



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 15 SEP 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	09/14 Northern Calif. wildfire largest blaze 2022
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-09-14/mosquito-fire-northern-california-mckinney-fire
GIST	<p>A wildfire west of Lake Tahoe continued to burn through historically dry vegetation Wednesday, roaring past 60,000 acres to become California's largest fire of the year as firefighters battled to protect mountain communities.</p> <p>The Mosquito fire, which is burning in Placer and El Dorado counties, grew by nearly 10,000 acres overnight, from 50,330 acres to 58,544 acres by Wednesday morning, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. By Wednesday night, the fire, which is 20% contained, had grown to 63,776 acres.</p>

The [McKinney fire](#) in Siskiyou County, previously the year's largest in California, has burned 60,138 acres and is 99% contained.

Although wind is most often a major concern in the growth of wildfires, the Mosquito fire has largely been driven by historically dry vegetation, exacerbated by last week's historic [heat wave](#), said Scott McLean, spokesman for the fire's joint command.

The West has long experienced episodes of dangerously elevated temperatures, but [studies have shown that human-caused climate change](#) is making heat waves more prolonged, frequent and intense, and [driving extreme wildfire behavior](#).

"Frankly, there's no moisture in the vegetation right now," McLean said. "You could throw one spark and it's going to start off."

Cooler temperatures and higher humidity Wednesday helped crews hold the fire inside established control lines, Cal Fire officials said.

Firefighters continued to patrol, mop up and secure lines along the Foresthill Road corridor, focusing on an area where a spot fire had made an aggressive run toward a community Tuesday.

The fire's eastern front continued to grow steadily "with active fire behavior into dense forested areas with critically dry fuels and little fire history," Cal Fire officials said.

Winds out of the southwest Wednesday proved lighter than the day before. Still, they were able to move a smoke inversion, where warm air traps smoke and cooler air below, out of the fire area, which gave crews more opportunities to attack the blaze using firefighting aircraft, officials said.

The Mosquito fire has destroyed 64 buildings, damaged 10 and is threatening 9,236 more, officials said.

Jonathan Pangburn, a fire behavior analyst with Cal Fire, said the blaze was reminiscent of the 2014 King fire, in which firefighters faced similarly dry fuel and, in some instances, had been surrounded by fast-moving flames, forcing them to deploy their emergency fire shelters.

"Those events were similar to this, not wind-driven events, just fuel that was primed and ready and decided to get up with a hurry and put some people in some dangerous situations," Pangburn said. "We're ready for an absolute blowup out here."

Smoke from the Mosquito fire continued to spread throughout Northern California.

Air quality in the Sacramento region was at unhealthy levels Wednesday and was expected to reach hazardous levels on Thursday and into the weekend, the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District [said on Twitter](#).

There were 3,052 personnel assigned to the Mosquito fire Wednesday, along with 80 water tenders and 65 bulldozers, Cal Fire officials said.

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HEADLINE	09/15 Iran closer to join Asian security body
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-signs-memorandum-joining-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-tass-2022-09-15/
GIST	DUBAI, Sept 15 (Reuters) - Iran has moved a step closer towards becoming a permanent member of a China and Russia-dominated Asian security body, as Tehran seeks to overcome economic isolation imposed by U.S. sanctions.

Foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Thursday said Iran had signed a memorandum of obligations to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is holding a summit this week in Uzbekistan.

The body, formed in the 2001 as a talking shop for Russia, China and ex-Soviet states in Central Asia, expanded four years ago to include India and Pakistan, with a view to playing a bigger role as counterweight to Western influence in the region.

"By signing the document for full membership of the SCO, now Iran has entered a new stage of various economic, commercial, transit and energy cooperation," Hossein Amirabdollahian wrote on his Instagram page.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was in the Silk Road oasis of Samarkand, Uzbekistan on Thursday to attend the summit. He held a bilateral meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Iranian state TV reported.

Last year, the central Asian security body approved Iran's application for accession, while Tehran's hardline rulers called on members to help it form a mechanism to avert sanctions imposed by the West over its disputed nuclear programme.

Iran will now be able to take part in the body's meetings, although it is likely to take some time to achieve full membership, deputy secretary-general of the organisation Grigory Logvinov told Russian state TV, which also reported the signing.

Iran's economy has been hit hard since 2018, when then-U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, including Russia and China.

Months of indirect talks between Iran and U.S. President Joe Biden's administration have hit a dead end over several obstacles to reviving the nuclear pact, under which Tehran agreed to curbs on its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of sanctions.

The U.S. sanctions and growing concerns about an emerging, U.S.-backed Gulf Arab-Israeli bloc that could shift the Middle East balance of power further away from Tehran have prompted Iran's clerical rulers to pursue closer economic and strategic ties with Russia, itself hit with sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

"Iran is determined to boost its ties with Russia, from economic to aerospace and political fields," Raisi said during his meeting with Putin, according to Iranian state media.

In July, just days after Biden visited Israel and Saudi Arabia, Putin visited Tehran in his first trip outside the former Soviet Union since the Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

Putin said on Thursday that a delegation of 80 large companies will visit Iran next week, Russian state-owned news agency RIA reported, in another sign of the growing ties with Iran.

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HEADLINE	09/15 Possible Putin assassination attempt?
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-vladimirputin/2022/09/14/id/1087524/
GIST	<p>The personal limousine of Russian President Vladimir Putin recently was "attacked" in an incident that included a "loud bang" and "heavy smoke" emanating from the left front wheel of the vehicle, according to media reports.</p> <p>There's also speculation that the apparent attack was an assassination attempt on Putin, perhaps involving events from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.</p>

Via Russia's SVR Telegram channel, a number of arrests have been made from the incident. Also, some of Putin's bodyguards have "vanished," according to SVR.

Putin, who reportedly escaped the situation unharmed, had been traveling back to his official residence in a decoy or backup motorcade, amid deep security fears, according to SVR, [via the Daily Mail](#).

The Daily Mail reported that a source said the large motorcade comprised five armored vehicles, with Putin occupying the third limo in line.

Here's the account from one SVR source, [via The Mirror](#): "On the way to the residence, a few kilometres away, the first escort car was blocked by an ambulance, [and] the second escort car drove around without stopping [due to the] sudden obstacle, and during the detour of the obstacle."

And in Putin's car, "a loud bang sounded from the left front wheel followed by heavy smoke," according to the SVR source.

The drama didn't end there, with SVR reporting the body of a man "driving [the] ambulance, which blocked the first car from the motorcade" was found shortly after the incident.

Despite "control" problems, Putin's limo made it out of the attack scene in relatively good shape and safely reached its destination.

The rollout of details might not come quickly, since the incident is reportedly being marked as "classified" within the Russian government.

"The head of the president's bodyguard [service] and several other people have been suspended and are in custody," SVR reported, [while falling short](#) of identifying anyone.

The SVR report continued: "A narrow circle of people knew about the movement of the president in this cortege, and all of them were from the presidential security service.

"After the incident, three of them disappeared. ... These were exactly the people who were in the first car of the motorcade."

Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, which first launched on Feb. 24, there have been a flood of unsubstantiated rumors of Putin, 69, [experiencing a health decline](#).

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HEADLINE	09/15 Xi, Putin hold summit in Uzbekistan
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-japan-india-asia-dbe2a0bda954e06bb8fcb7cccbd39b21?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_3
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin and leaders from India and Central Asia gathered Thursday in Uzbekistan for a summit of a security group formed by Beijing and Moscow as a counterweight to U.S. influence.</p> <p>The meeting Friday of the eight-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organization is overshadowed by Putin's attack on Ukraine and strains in China's relations with Washington, Europe, Japan and India due to disputes over technology, security and territory.</p> <p>The event in the ancient sultanate of Samarkand is part of Xi's first foreign trip since the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic 2 1/2 years ago, underscoring Beijing's desire to assert itself as a regional power.</p> <p>Putin and Xi were due to meet one-on-one and discuss Ukraine, according to the Russian president's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov.</p>

Xi's government, which said it had a "no limits" friendship with Moscow before the invasion, has refused to criticize the attack. Beijing and India are buying more Russian oil and gas, which helps Moscow offset the impact of Western sanctions.

China "states explicitly that it understands the reasons that forced Russia to launch a special military operation," Ushakov said Thursday, according to the Russian news agency ITAR-Tass.

Putin planned to meet Friday with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ITAR-Tass said, citing Ushakov.

There was no indication whether Modi might meet Xi. Chinese-Indian relations are strained due to clashes between soldiers from the two sides in a dispute over a border in a remote area of the Himalayas.

Other SCO governments include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan.

The meeting planned to consider an application by Iran, an observer of the group, to become a full member, according to ITAR-Tass.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, which has the status of "dialogue partner," was also in attendance.

Putin and Erdogan planned on Friday to "evaluate the effectiveness" of a deal under which wheat exports from Ukraine via the Black Sea resumed, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said, according to ITAR-Tass.

The Chinese leader is promoting a "Global Security Initiative" announced in April following the formation of the Quad by Washington, Japan, Australia and India in response to Beijing's more assertive foreign policy. Xi has given few details, but U.S. officials complain it echoes Russian arguments in support of Moscow's attack on Ukraine.

The region is part of China's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative to expand trade by building ports, railways and other infrastructure across an arc of dozens of countries from the South Pacific through Asia to the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

On Thursday, Xi met with President Sadyr Zhaparov of Kyrgyzstan and said Beijing supports the "early operation" of a planned railway linking China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Chinese foreign ministry said.

China's economic inroads into Central Asia have fueled unease in Russia, which sees the region as its sphere of influence.

Xi made a one-day visit Wednesday to Kazakhstan en route to Uzbekistan. Pope Francis was in Kazakhstan, but they didn't meet.

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HEADLINE	09/15 Health experts warn of difficult flu season
SOURCE	https://thehill.com/policy/3643442-nation-warned-to-brace-for-a-difficult-flu-season/
GIST	<p>Health experts are warning the nation to brace for what could be an exceptionally severe flu season this fall and winter, as more people who have not built up immunity over the last few years mix and mingle. There are two big reasons why more people could be vulnerable to the flu this year.</p> <p>The first is that with coronavirus restrictions such as the wearing of masks all but forgotten, people are more likely to come into contact with the flu virus this year than over the last two years.</p>

The second reason is that fewer people are likely to be immune from the flu virus this year because fewer people have been getting the flu over the last two years — as the pandemic locked people down and as people worried more about getting COVID-19.

Richard Webby, a virologist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital's infectious diseases department, said the past two flu seasons simply have not seen the same levels of exposure to the flu.

"As a population, our immunity to the flu is down a bit," Webby said. "When the virus comes back, it's probably going to have a little bit more room to spread, a little bit more room to potentially cause disease."

In a normal year, exposure to the influenza virus generates some community immunity as about 10 to 30 percent of people are exposed to the flu in a normal season.

But fewer people were exposed in 2020 and 2021, resulting in a decline in natural immunity.

For example, pediatric flu deaths normally exceeded 100 every year before the pandemic.

But the past two flu seasons have seen reported pediatric flu deaths fall under 40, with only one pediatric death confirmed in 2020.

This lowered population immunity means that people are at a higher risk of contracting the flu this year, according to Webby.

Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, said the flu season for the past two years has essentially been "nonexistent" and added that this trend was always bound to end once social distancing became less practiced.

According to Adalja, evidence of the flu picking back up is a sign that people are returning to "some semblance of their life pre-COVID."

The Southern Hemisphere is giving the United States a preview of sorts of what is to come.

It's been winter in the Southern Hemisphere, and those countries have experienced a tough flu season. Australia, as one example, experienced its worst flu season in five years, with the rate of cases peaking earlier than it usually does in the country.

In both 2020 and 2021, the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care noted a lower rate of reported flu cases and severity, with only 37 laboratory-confirmed flu-associated deaths reported in 2020 and zero reported in 2021. Flu hospitalizations and deaths reached an all-time low in Australia last year.

There were nearly 600 cases of laboratory-confirmed influenza in Australia in 2021. During this year's flu season, the country has reported more than 217,000 cases, though this is still lower than in 2019, when Australia reported more than 300,000 cases, the highest number of cases on record for the country.

Webby noted flu deaths and hospitalizations in Australia were still relatively low this year despite the sizable flu season that the country saw. Deaths and hospitalizations are largely driven by infections among the elderly, and Australia still practiced precautions when it came to this demographic.

If such precautions are also taken in the U.S., then higher flu hospitalizations and deaths could similarly be avoided, Webby said.

Experts who spoke with The Hill agreed that what was observed in the Southern Hemisphere appeared to be something of a return to a normal flu season, one that was not "suppressed" by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Webby and Adalja were doubtful that a "twindemic" of both flu and coronavirus would occur this year.

“I don’t think that these two viruses can sort of go gangbusters at the same time,” Webby said.

With the recent authorization of the bivalent COVID-19 booster dose, the White House has begun recommending that people receive both their booster shots and flu shots at the same time, hoping to avoid surges of both viruses.

For the 2022-2023 flu season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has stated that September and October are good times to get vaccinated.

With many COVID-19-conscious people likely to get their booster shots sooner than later, some have questioned whether September, when COVID-19 boosters became available, is too soon to get immunized against the flu and if it would be better to get the two shots at different times.

Adalja said it was better to time your flu shot so that it is effective throughout the entire flu season.

“If you get it too early, there’s clear evidence that it wanes off by the end of the season,” he said. “Traditionally, it peaked around February. So if you’re getting a flu shot now in early September, you can’t expect it to be that effective at the tail end of the flu season. So I’ve always recommended people get their flu vaccine sometime in late October.”

Adalja further said he did not believe the White House’s recommendation of getting flu shots at the same time as COVID-19 shots was evidence-based.

“What they’re trying to do is increase uptake of both and come up with a kind of a gimmick for people to get, you know, a two-for-one, when it really may foul up the efficacy of the flu vaccine if it’s given too early,” said Adalja.

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HEADLINE	09/15 Migrant buses arrive DC outside VP home
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/politics/2-migrant-buses-arrive-vice-president-kamala-harris-naval-observatory-residence-dc
GIST	<p>Two migrant buses from Del Rio, Texas, arrived near Vice President Kamala Harris' residence at the Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C., Thursday morning.</p> <p>Between 75 and 100 people who were picked up in Eagle Pass, Texas, were sent by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott. The group includes migrants from Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia and Mexico. Multiple migrants, asked by Fox News Digital, said they think the border is open, contrary to what Harris said Sunday during an interview.</p> <p>This latest convoy of buses arrived just hours after Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis followed through on his similar promise to drop off illegal immigrants in progressive states, sending two planes full of migrants to Martha’s Vineyard on Wednesday.</p> <p>The ongoing relocation of incoming illegal border-crossers has become a popular method of protest for southern states overrun with migrants that are feeling ignored by President Biden's administration.</p> <p>Abbott has sent dozens of buses filled with border-crossers to Washington, D.C., New York City and Chicago in recent weeks.</p> <p>Abbott argues that border towns in Texas are overwhelmed, and those in power in D.C. and NYC should face the realities of the border crisis.</p> <p>Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser declared a public emergency last week over the buses of migrants' continued arrival in the city from Texas and Arizona.</p>

	<p>Bowser's emergency declaration will set aside funding to accommodate migrants as well as create the Office of Migrant Services. The OMS will be tasked with providing temporary accommodations, urgent medical needs, transportation" and other services for migrants.</p> <p>Brianne Nadeau, a member of the Council of the District of Columbia, blamed the governors of Texas and Arizona for the city's public migrant emergency.</p> <p>Speaking in a situational update on migrant support alongside Bowser, she said Thursday that the city's systems were not set up to serve the migrants that continue to arrive in the city from the southern states.</p> <p>"So, it's been said, but it's worth reiterating, that the governors of Texas and Arizona have created this crisis. And, the federal government has not stepped up to assist the District of Columbia," she told reporters. "So we, along with our regional partners, we'll do what we've always done. We'll rise to the occasion."</p> <p>Abbott argues that border towns in Texas are overwhelmed, and those in power in the liberal-run cities should face the realities of the border crisis.</p> <p>Bowser has twice now requested that the National Guard be activated to assist with thousands of migrants arriving in the nation's capital. Both requests have been denied by the Pentagon.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Central Washington home prices spike
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/09/central-wa-home-prices-spike-amid-influx-seattle-area-transplants
GIST	<p>Growing up, Angela Bender and her family traveled from their home near Woodinville to camp in Cle Elum and Roslyn in upper Kittitas County at least once a year. Through these frequent visits, Bender developed her love for the outdoors and became an avid hiker and fisher.</p> <p>As an adult, she had the best of both worlds: the energy and culture of living in downtown Seattle, where she worked as a technology consultant, and the quiet and tranquil life when she visited Kittitas County. "It's always been a place of peace and sanctuary," she said.</p> <p>But things got off-balance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bender was confined to her downtown Seattle apartment when she started working remotely. The restaurants and cultural events she once enjoyed were closed due to restrictions, and when she could go out, she felt less safe with the growing presence of homelessness and drug use in her neighborhood.</p> <p>During the early days of the pandemic, she started to consider whether it was time to leave Seattle. And when she began looking for homes, she knew where to look first: Kittitas County.</p> <p>"There are many beautiful things about the city," she said. "[But] I needed to make a change that would allow me to feel at peace in my home and community."</p> <p>When the pandemic limited travel and forced many professional workers to work remotely, many city-dwellers like Bender sought retreat in the mountains, trails and waterways of Central Washington. Chelan and Kittitas counties were a short car ride away.</p> <p>In the same places Seattleites found recreation and retreat, demand for second homes — and even permanent single residences — soared. That drove, in turn, a massive increase in home prices in Chelan and Kittitas counties, making them the most expensive counties east of the Cascades.</p> <p>Chelan and Kittitas counties reported median sale prices of \$636,800 and \$559,400, respectively, at the end of June 2022, according to the Washington Center for Real Estate Research, based at the University of Washington's Runstad Center.</p>

Those prices are by far the highest for counties east of the Cascades, and they nearly match those in some Western Washington counties. The median home price in Pierce County, for example, was \$579,900 at the end of June this year.

“We’re not as cheap and affordable as we used to be,” said Kitty Wallace, managing broker of RE/Max Integrity in Cle Elum.

Big change over two decades

When Wallace started selling real estate in Cle Elum in the early 2000s, the communities of Roslyn and Cle Elum — known as upper Kittitas County — began attracting Western Washington residents seeking an alternative to the long commutes and traffic that came with living in the Seattle area.

One can drive from Seattle to the two communities — easily accessible from several exits on Interstate 90 — in about an hour and a half. With many Puget Sound residents already [spending one to two hours each way](#) in traffic, some decided they preferred to make that drive end in a smaller and more affordable community.

The median price for homes sold in Kittitas County was [\\$250,000 during the second quarter of 2008](#), during the Great Recession, less than half the cost of those over a decade later. With King County’s median price in 2008 nearly double, \$450,000, one could get a much larger home in Kittitas County with proceeds from a home sale in Seattle.

And many new residents worked out deals with their employer to work from home — it was a time when working remotely was not as common as now — limiting the number of days they would have to drive to the city.

“You [could] get to your job quicker than somebody coming from Olympia driving into the city,” Wallace said.

Meanwhile, there was another development in the early 2000s: the construction of Suncadia, the four-season resort just outside Roslyn.

While Kittitas County had plenty of popular spots for activities such as hiking, camping and fishing in the summer and snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter, the area wasn’t exactly a vacation destination. Many saw the area as a rest stop or a place to drive through, Wallace said.

The developers behind Suncadia looked to change that. The resort wanted to offer a variety of year-round activities and amenities, such as an ice rink in the winter and a swimming pool in the summer. And with a variety of single-family homes and condo options, Suncadia was expected to boost the region’s second-home market.

However, the resort’s 2005 opening landed a few years before the recession, which dried up real estate markets for several years. “We saw a lot of things go into foreclosure,” Wallace said.

After a slow recovery, the real estate market in Kittitas County picked up again. People started looking at homes in Kittitas County again, including in Suncadia.

But then the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. With initial pandemic restrictions limiting real estate activity, Wallace anticipated a lean market. “I was prepared to hunker down and save all my pennies,” she said.

Instead, real estate brokers have weathered a frantic real estate market during the pandemic.

“Our demand just intensified during that first year of COVID,” said Sheri Bay, managing broker and director for John L. Scott Real Estate, which has several offices in the area.

Part of the demand came from the second-home market. With pandemic restrictions limiting travel and activities, outdoor recreation became popular, making Kittitas County and other Eastern Washington areas with ample recreation options desired destinations. Suddenly, high-end homes, like those in the Suncadia resort, that were once in the high six figures were now going for \$1 million to \$2 million, Wallace said.

Meanwhile, some Washingtonians facing remote work indefinitely decided it was time to relocate to the area permanently, Wallace said.

Unlike the early 2000s, when Western Washingtonians moving eastward were retired or nearing retirement age, this new group of pandemic-era residents were technology workers in their 30s and 40s, Wallace said. They were workers at Microsoft, Amazon and other well-known tech companies.

While Kittitas County became far less affordable compared to 10 years ago, it was still reasonable compared to King County, where the median sale price was pushing \$1 million, according to the Washington Center for Real Estate Research.

“We’re still affordable in that aspect. Keep in mind, you won’t have to commute for employment,” Wallace said. “So if you have the ability to work from home, then this might be a good spot for you.”

As a result, many looked at homes, creating a fierce market, Bay said. Buyers, determined to get a winning offer, were often willing to pay well above the list price and even forgo contingencies such as a home inspection to make their bid more appealing, she said.

“As a broker, my job is to say, ‘You should not write an offer without a home inspection,’” Bay said. “But, by the way, if you don’t [leave out the home inspection], you won’t get the house.”

Prices have soared: Between the end of June 2020 and June 2022, the median sale price for Kittitas County went from \$403,000 to \$559,400, a 39% increase over two years, according to data from the Washington Center for Real Estate Research.

Bender, the downtown Seattle resident, started looking for a new house around this time. In this frenzied market, she lost out on three homes to winning bids upward of \$75,000 above the list price.

She decided to pause her efforts. “It was really frustrating,” Bender said.

A new lifestyle in Lake Chelan

While the Roslyn/Cle Elum area has established itself as a vacation spot in only the past two decades, Lake Chelan has been an established vacation spot for nearly a century.

Lake Chelan, a natural lake that spans more than 50 miles, is located in northern Chelan County and surrounded by the city of Chelan and several unincorporated areas.

Businessman Adam Rynd has called Chelan home for a decade. Like many Puget Sound residents, Rynd spent many summers growing up at Lake Chelan.

Those visits continued when Rynd raised a family of his own in Western Washington and worked for various tech companies. In 2010 he and his wife purchased a vacation home in the area and relocated there full-time in 2012.

Today Rynd owns or co-owns several businesses, including a winery and a toy store.

He also runs Coldwell Banker Cascade Real Estate, which has offices in Chelan, Wenatchee, Winthrop, and Goldendale.

“I just really enjoy helping people and helping them manage big transactions in their lives,” he said.

Over time he's seen more Western Washington families purchase property in Chelan County. He's worked with many of them, selling a number of homes at The Lookout at Lake Chelan, a new residential community that offers amenities such as a swimming pool and bike trails.

Others are relocating to Wenatchee, the most populous city in Chelan County, to get a jump on emerging industries — namely agricultural technology, cryptocurrency and even diamond production — or to have easy access to comprehensive health care during retirement, Rynd said.

In both cases, quality of life, including easy access to a variety of recreation and little traffic, is a factor for many to relocate from the Seattle area. Rynd notes that many recent homebuyers he's seen in Wenatchee and Chelan have relocated from downtown Seattle.

"I think it's lifestyle-driven. ... the issues with density. Frankly, rioting, homelessness, a sense of lawlessness in certain areas," he said. "There's a desire to get more space. Have a lifestyle that is less stressful."

However, Chelan County did not have enough homes for the existing local market, let alone to supply a market driven by new residents from Seattle and other parts of the U.S., said Steve Bishop, managing broker for Premier One Properties, a real estate firm in Wenatchee.

As a result, homes on the market received multiple offers that drove up prices drastically. The median home price in Chelan County went from \$391,500 at the second quarter of 2020 to more than \$636,800 two years later, a whopping 63% increase.

A few years ago, selling a \$1 million home in Chelan County would take some time. Now a home at that price is expected to be gone within a few months, Bishop said. A half-million dollars is required these days to buy an average house; even more is needed for high-end homes in vacation areas such as Lake Chelan.

Bishop, who has worked in real estate for nearly four decades and sold homes to multiple generations in the same family, said he's seen real estate in Chelan County change drastically. "We were very much a regional market; local economics pretty well drove value," he said. "[Now] we're impacted by things that are beyond our control outside of the area. That makes it less predictable."

Affordability matters

Affordability may seem irrelevant to homebuyers who can buy homes in the high six figures or even above \$1 million. However, real estate brokers in both Chelan and Kittitas County said that even high-end buyers can be priced out.

If those buyers purchase homes at lower price ranges, that downward activity may ultimately lead to homebuyers with smaller budgets being unable to buy a home entirely, said Bishop, the Wenatchee real estate broker.

Tourist areas in Kittitas and Chelan counties such as Roslyn, Cle Elum, Chelan and Leavenworth need workers for services such as restaurants and grocery stores. Local service workers who often earn far less than tech workers are getting priced out of buying homes or even renting, said Wallace, the Cle Elum real estate broker.

"You have to have the service sector be able to afford to live here," Wallace said. "Especially with the price of gas. They can't be commuting from a less expensive area and work here because it's just not going to pencil out for them."

More housing is being built in Kittitas and Chelan counties, but much of it is not within reach of low-income or middle-income residents, said Bay, the John L. Scott managing broker in Cle Elum.

In Kittitas County, new home construction includes custom homes in Suncadia that cost \$1 million or more. Even home developments elsewhere in Cle Elum come in a half a million each.

Rynd, the real estate broker in Chelan, said he's worked on projects with a local housing trust, such as one in Chelan that provided five townhomes at an affordable price. The two-bedroom homes cost \$200,000, well below the nearly half-million median prices for homes sold in April 2021, when the project was completed. The much lower price was possible by having the buyer lease the land from the housing trust but own the home. "The challenge is trying to scale that," he said.

There's general agreement that local and statewide planning and zoning regulations could also impact a community's ability to bring in additional home stock.

Bishop said he's seen government officials give lip service to affordable housing, then make it difficult for builders to finish projects on time. He said he's not against reasonable regulation, such as those that ensure a home's design or zoning isn't disruptive to neighbors. Still, he feels that implementing additional requirements — such as barriers for sidewalks in areas that previously never required them — can be excessive and only hamper the building pipeline.

In Kittitas County, Wallace said she would like officials to look into zoning that would allow the construction of duplexes and different kinds of multifamily housing. Most existing construction is for custom single-family homes. As a result, the home supply in the area consists of large high-end homes and older, smaller 1,500-square-foot homes but not much in between, Wallace said.

What is not being built is the spec homes that were being built across the U.S. for first- or second-time homebuyers in the 2000s, she said.

However, while affordability continues to be an issue, there is some relief. While prices have continued to appreciate, they have not been increasing at the same rate as a year ago. Instead of pushing 50%, appreciation is usually between 4% and 10%, Wallace said.

Bay, the John L. Scott managing broker, said that's partly because more homes are coming onto the market. Interest rates also increased, which slightly tempered the market. As a result, buyers in the market now are more likely to look for homes at a less frantic pace.

Bender, the downtown Seattle resident, resumed her home search more than two months ago. She again made offers that did not pan out. But then a home came on the market a month ago, a cabin-style house in a local golf-course community.

She had to pay a little more than she planned and at a higher interest rate than when she'd looked previously, but Bender managed to negotiate with the buyer and settle on a price within her budget. She picked up the keys last week and is now in the process of moving in.

Bender plans to live primarily in Cle Elum and work remotely. However, her partner will have a place in Seattle where she will stay if she has business in the city.

"I'm happy this is happening now," she said. "I have time to make the transition east before the weather turns bad."

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HEADLINE	09/14 WA tax system worsens income inequality
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/equity/2022/09/washington-states-tax-system-worsening-income-inequality
GIST	ABERDEEN, Wash. — As she opened her \$1,600 property-tax bill in February, Edith Baltazar suddenly lost her appetite for the eggs she'd prepared for lunch with her daughter. Her thoughts raced: Would their home be taken away if she couldn't pay it.

Baltazar's daughter wept. The family would have to make a difficult decision: the property tax or \$2,000 for diabetes medication.

The taxes won.

"Sometimes you have to choose — pay your property taxes instead of paying your water bill and everything else," said Baltazar, recalling the stressful experience in a July interview.

The lowest-earning residents in Washington state, where Baltazar lives, [pay almost 18% of their annual incomes in state and local taxes](#), while the wealthiest chip in 3%.

All but a handful of states make poor residents contribute a greater share of their income to taxes than wealthy people do. Economists call that upside-down approach "regressive." Nationwide, the share lowest-income earners pay to state and local taxes is 54% higher than what top earners pay, according to the [Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy](#).

And those policies hit communities of color the hardest.

Undocumented immigrants contribute billions of dollars in state and local taxes, according to [estimates](#) by ITEP and [other groups](#), but aren't eligible for many tax-funded services or tax rebates. Studies show assessors tend to [inflate property tax assessments of low-priced properties](#), disproportionately owned by Black and Latino people. The higher tax bills increase the odds of what Baltazar feared — [losing your home](#).

All this means state and local tax systems that could help address America's widening economic inequality are instead making the problem worse.

The federal system also increases inequality, with legal loopholes giving [very high-net-worth people massive tax breaks](#). But the Internal Revenue Service doesn't force low-income residents to shoulder the biggest relative burden. Most states do.

"We're asking people to fund government programs even when they can't afford basic needs, like food and shelter," Ariel Jurow Kleiman, an associate professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles who focuses on tax law and policy, said via email. "That strikes me as profoundly unfair."

A key reason: sales and other consumption taxes. Unlike the federal government, almost all states collect them. Spend \$50 on clothes for your kid, and you'll pay the same sales tax as anyone else in your area, regardless of income. The poorer you are, the greater the share of your resources the sales tax gobbles up.

Income tax is the main tool states have to counteract that. But some choose to tax everyone at the same rate, rather than following the federal model of increasing up the income scale.

And some states, like Washington, don't tax income at all. These places lean especially heavily on sales tax and other revenue options that make lower-income people contribute more.

How a state chooses to collect money impacts not only who pays more but also how much revenue it generates to fund public services. Poor people handing over a higher percentage of their income in taxes and fees to fund state and local services often end up with [less in return](#). That's often the case with [school funding](#).

In a [2018 study](#), ITEP found that tax structures vary widely even in states with similar costs of living and demographic makeup. The organization ranked Washington as having the most regressive tax system in the nation, for instance, while judging neighboring Oregon's system as one of the most equitable.

With no state income tax, Washington's [average state and local sales taxes](#) of more than 9% are among the nation's highest. This is what Baltazar faces every day. When the time came to pay the first installment of her property taxes, there was no flexibility left in the family's budget.

Baltazar, her husband Rafael and adult daughter Kary had all lost their full-time jobs and couldn't get unemployment benefits. Her husband, who found occasional work on a farm, went without insulin for three months so they could pay the property tax. They relied on home remedies such as hibiscus tea as well as a small supply of the diabetes pill Metformin to manage his Type 2 diabetes instead. He developed a [painful stomach ulcer](#) that caused him to stop working altogether.

There's no mystery about how states can make their tax systems more equitable, policy analysts say. "A progressive income tax with multiple rates that go up the higher the income is very boring and it's not new, but it's really the only way," said Richard Auxier, a senior policy associate with the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center.

But making that change won't be easy. Some states have gone to extra lengths to ensure efforts to tax poor people less and rich people more end in failure.

How did we get here?

Some of the most regressive state tax policies today originated during the Reconstruction era that followed the Civil War, when Southern state governments had to start building schools and providing other government-funded services to formerly enslaved people.

Tax rates nearly doubled in the South between 1860 and 1870. According to a 2019 [National Bureau of Economic Research paper](#), white Southerners violently resisted changes to the tax code that could redistribute wealth built from slavery, organizing to intimidate Black politicians. Larger tax revenues in areas "were strongly correlated with an increased likelihood of a violent attack against black policymakers," economics scholar Trevon D. Logan found.

Ultimately this led to the adoption of tax policies that favored whites. In 1890, Mississippi adopted a new constitution with a provision to require three-fifths-majority votes to pass most tax increases, guaranteeing that white legislators could block such changes even if they were in the minority. In 1901, Alabama adopted a new constitution with caps on property taxes, which limited the amount of money white homeowners would have to contribute to fund Black public schools.

One Mississippi delegate, Marye Dabney, [wrote a few years later](#) that the major goal of the 1890 constitution was to "effectually remove from the sphere of politics in the State the ignorant and unpatriotic negro."

State tax code can't be divorced from the "racist, sexist, classist" laws and practices that prevent large groups of people from building wealth, said Andy Nicholas, senior fellow at the [Washington State Budget & Policy Center](#).

When Washington state was still a territory in 1864, the government levied a tax on Chinese adults to deter migrant workers from settling in the area. That was repealed five years later.

In the early 1930s, a coalition of urban workers and rural farmers in the state [helped pass a ballot initiative](#) to reduce property taxes and create a personal income tax with rates increasing up the income scale. The Washington Supreme Court threw it out in 1933, saying it violated the state's constitution.

"It definitely took away a tool that could have been there, and it forced lawmakers to rely on consumption taxes," said Nicholas. The state's tax system hasn't changed much since.

At the other end of the continuum is Oregon, which has an income tax with rates that rise as earnings do and is one of five states without a sales tax.

Whenever he gives talks on tax policy, Juan Carlos Ordóñez at the Oregon Center for Public Policy points to his neighboring state as an example of what not to do.

The “situation in Washington is diametrically opposed and much worse for low-income folks,” he said. Still, Ordóñez said, Oregon’s tax structure is considered only “mildly progressive.”

Oregon has a tax rebate known as “the kicker,” [approved by voters in 1980](#) to kick money back to taxpayers when revenue tops projections by at least 2%. This year, the richest 1% of residents received a \$17,000 rebate. The lowest-earning 20% of Oregonians averaged \$30.

An anti-tax movement prompted overhauls of the state’s system in the 1990s, capping property taxes and making it harder to pass bills for raising revenue.

The state’s wave of tax provisions that largely benefit people with more means — disproportionately white — were part of a nationwide trend that gained steam beginning in the 1970s.

“After the victories of the civil rights movement, there’s this backlash to the public sector that’s motivated, certainly in part, by racism,” Ordóñez said. “We’re sort of stuck with suffering the consequences of those decisions and the misguided policy that sees public investments in a very detrimental way.”

Ballot measures and legislative action aren’t the only explanations for regressive systems. Courts play a role too.

In Pennsylvania, judges have consistently interpreted the 1870s [uniformity clause](#) in the state’s constitution — that “all taxes shall be uniform, upon the same class of subjects” — in a narrow way that saves wealthier people money at low-income taxpayers’ expense.

The clause was a reaction to legislative favoritism of railroads and big businesses in the 19th century. But it ultimately stopped the state from creating a graduated income tax like the federal government. Instead, Pennsylvania has a flat rate, said [Frances Beckley](#), an educator at the Temple University Beasley School of Law’s Center for Tax Law and Public Policy. It also taxes commercial real estate at the same level as residential.

Forty-eight states have uniformity clauses in their constitutions regarding state and local taxes, [according to The Pew Charitable Trusts](#). Few are bound by court decisions like Pennsylvania’s.

“Those legal interpretations which do not flow necessarily from the language of the constitution, but are now very well established in Pennsylvania law, put real limits on doing anything progressive in terms of taxes,” Beckley said.

The unequal weight of sales taxes

The federal government used to rely on customs duties, a cousin of sales tax. The [Sixteenth Amendment](#) in 1913 added income taxes, at first only on the wealthiest people. When the country needed more money to fund war efforts, it increased those rates on high earners.

“Part of the reason the federal tax system got so progressive was a historical accident of the income tax coming in at the right time,” said Lawrence Zelenak, a professor at Duke University School of Law.

In 2005, then President George W. Bush tapped experts to recommend [federal tax code reforms](#). One change they [advised against](#): replacing the income tax with a federal sales tax. The burden, the panel concluded, would fall on lower- and middle-income Americans the most.

Total federal taxes for a lower-income single mother with one child would increase more than eightfold from \$723 to \$6,186 under such a system, the U.S. Department of Treasury estimated at the time. A national sales tax policy was never adopted.

But by then, nearly all states relied on sales taxes.

The first, Mississippi, adopted it amid the mass unemployment of the Great Depression. Mississippi Gov. Mike Conner, later described in a [Time magazine](#) article as “solidly foursquare for white supremacy,” wanted to turn around a huge budget deficit while reducing property taxes.

The beneficiaries — property owners — were overwhelmingly white. Overall taxes increased for Black families, who were less likely to own property.

Louisiana, which created its first sales tax several years later in 1938, today has the nation’s [highest combined state and local sales tax rate](#) at 9.55%, according to the Tax Foundation. Its poverty rate, meanwhile, is 50% higher than the national average.

The state’s heavy reliance on sales tax revenue exacerbates the wealth gap between white and Black families, according to a 2021 [report by the Louisiana Budget Project](#) that used ITEP data. Mostly because of sales tax, Black households there pay the highest share of income on taxes while white households pay the lowest, the study found.

“Make no mistake, Louisiana’s lower-income communities and communities of color are subsidizing lower taxes for rich households and corporations through our high sales tax rates,” said Neva Butkus, state policy analyst at ITEP.

The difficulties that high sales taxes cause low-income families aren’t just financial. A mother in Alabama was recently reported to the state’s Department of Human Resources, which includes Child Protective Services, for not sending diapers to daycare when she couldn’t afford them, said Lindsay Gray, executive director of nonprofit diaper bank Bundles of Hope in Birmingham.

Birmingham’s combined state and local sales taxes [are even higher than Louisiana’s average](#). People who aren’t financially strapped might think the nearly \$5 of sales tax on top of \$50 of diapers isn’t much, “but it really impacts a family in a huge way,” Gray said.

“When families literally have \$0, that \$5 over and over again really adds up and really can be devastating,” she said. “Every single quarter and dollar counts when families live in poverty.”

Delaware, one of the few states without sales tax, manages it by collecting an unusually high share of its revenue from fees associated with headquartering a company in the state. That’s driven by its reputation as an especially business-friendly [tax haven](#).

It makes Delaware a rarity with [mildly progressive taxes](#) overall, but at the expense of other states’ revenue. The companies that would otherwise have paid them corporate taxes get to avoid it with [a Delaware address](#).

The state, meanwhile, has lowered income taxes on top earners over time. Its top rate is half as high as its pre-1985 level. And it starts taxing low-income residents once they cross the \$2,000 threshold, [much lower than where federal taxes kick in](#).

State Rep. John Kowalko said his efforts to increase the rate for the wealthiest residents and lower taxes on the poorest died in committee, victims of a political ideology that favors low taxes and minimal scrutiny of corporate behavior as a means of encouraging businesses to set up shop in the state.

“They’d say, ‘You have this many businesses in your district,’” Kowalko said of those arguing against changing the state’s tax structure. “They also conveniently leave out, ‘You also have 20,000 people that pay your taxes at an unfair rate.’”

What’s the path to more equitable taxes?

State and local governments have two main tools to make taxes more equitable, said Loyola Law School's Jurow Kleiman: reducing the taxes low-income people pay through more progressive income tax structures and transferring money through programs and rebates, such as state versions of the federal [Earned Income Tax Credit](#).

"It's all part of the higher cost of being poor," Jurow Kleiman said of taxation that hits low-income people harder. "But in the case of taxes it's a cost imposed consciously and intentionally by governments, which in theory means there's something we can do about it relatively easily."

[Thirty-four states](#) as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico have such tax credits, though most are small. Some are nonrefundable, meaning that people can't get back more than what they owe in taxes. Jurow Kleiman said refundable credits are more equitable policies, because they can act as cash transfers to households that are too poor to owe high income taxes.

Many rebates also include carve-outs that limit eligibility, Jurow Kleiman said. Some programs are only for seniors or don't allow childless workers to participate.

While undocumented immigrants are ineligible to receive federal Earned Income Tax Credits, several states, including [California](#), [Colorado](#) and [Maine](#), have expanded their tax credit to include eligible workers regardless of immigration status.

Washington, D.C., [followed suit this year](#) and is expanding its credit to match the federal amount by tax year 2026, something [no state has done](#). Officials funded that — and other budget items to help lower-income residents — by changing income tax rates and brackets last year. Now top earners pay a greater portion of their income than the rest of the district instead of the other way around, the DC Fiscal Policy Institute says.

"I will just note that [this] enhances racial equity in our tax code as well, because households at the high end of the income spectrum, folks in that top 20%, are disproportionately white," said Erica Williams, the institute's executive director. "Folks who are in the bottom 20 to 40% are disproportionately Black and brown folks."

Top leaders in some states acknowledge their tax rules are regressive. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee "has reminded people of this fact while advancing policies to make our system more balanced," spokesperson Mike Faulk said in an email.

Beginning next February, more than 400,000 Washingtonians will be eligible to apply for a new Working Families Tax Credit worth up to \$1,200.

And last year the state enacted a [7% tax on the exchange or sale of capital assets](#) such as stocks and bonds on profits exceeding \$250,000. The revenue will go toward funding [childcare and early learning](#) — if it survives [an ongoing legal fight](#).

But some states are going the other direction, approving tax changes likely to shift more of the burden [onto lower-income earners](#).

So far this year, at least 10 states cut [their personal income tax rates](#), largely in ways that benefit upper-income people, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Some of these states also lowered their corporate tax rates.

Idaho, for example, reduced the tax rate on its highest-income bracket. South Carolina did the same while promising additional cuts to the top rate should the state meet revenue targets.

Georgia, Iowa and Mississippi went a step further, replacing their graduated income tax brackets with a flat tax.

Flat income tax rates tend to exacerbate economic inequality: In Illinois, [which has one](#), the state's poorest residents [paid more than 14%](#) of their income in total state and local taxes while the wealthiest paid a little more than 7%.

The changes in tax policy in Georgia and Mississippi will disproportionately benefit white residents, according to an [ITEP analysis](#), while reducing state revenue that could be going toward services like education that can reduce inequality.

A quality-of-life struggle

In Washington's financially stressed Aberdeen, Baltazar's community, the effects of state decisions about how to tax and where to spend — and not spend — are visible everywhere.

About 80 miles southwest of Seattle, Aberdeen's once-booming lumber industry began to decline in the early 1980s due to environmental concerns and demand loss. Wages fell. From 2016 to 2020, median household income in the county, Grays Harbor, was \$26,000 less than the state median. The poverty rate was [more than 50% higher](#). [Suicide rates](#) are elevated, too.

On an overcast, gray day with intermittent rain in early July, four people drove around the city center, pointing out houses with weathered facades. They work or volunteer for [Firelands Workers Action](#), a social welfare organization that advocates for workers in Washington's timber country.

"The state of the housing makes a lot of people sick," said the organization's executive director, Stina Janssen, looking out from the back seat next to Baltazar. "It's full of mold ... and it's extremely expensive to heat or cool."

They drove past a homeless encampment, tents pitched beside a field with boulders. Passing over the Chehalis River, Baltazar said: "A lot of people come here and take their life away on this bridge."

Formed in 2019, Firelands Workers Action advocates for good-paying jobs, affordable housing and access to healthcare. Leaders think a state tax system that asks more of high-income earners would provide funding for the better housing, schools and mental health resources the county so desperately needs.

"There's not enough spaces for community, not enough resources in the school for them to go to counseling," said Baltazar, who moved to the area in 1993 from Mexico.

When she lost her restaurant job due to an injury in 2019, Baltazar struggled to get another full-time position. She volunteered for Firelands as she searched.

A month after the property-tax bill arrived, her luck turned. She landed a job as a Firelands organizer, and her husband and daughter are both employed again too.

Still, there's not enough money to go around. With a more equitable tax system, Baltazar said, perhaps she could afford repairs on her house and get a mammogram. Perhaps her county could get the resources to build a levee to reduce flooding.

It's a relief, at least, to have the means to shop for groceries again. The family relied on a food bank for the first time during their two-year rough stretch beginning in 2020. Now when she's off work, Baltazar packs a picnic of sandwiches and fruit to watch the sunset with her husband at Lake Quinault, 45 minutes north of her house.

"We struggled so much in the past," she said, "and we need to enjoy life."

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HEADLINE	09/14 Kremlin blames military for Russia failures
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-09-14/kremlin-distancing-putin-from-russian-military-failures-analysis

The Kremlin is manufacturing a crisis with its Ministry of Defense in an attempt to distance President Vladimir Putin from the [stunning retreats](#) and other [embarrassing battlefield failures](#) in Ukraine in recent days, according to a new analysis.

The Institute for the Study of War, an independent think tank, noted that Russia has acknowledged its military's defeat around Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, following [a surprise](#) and [startlingly effective Ukrainian counteroffensive](#) beginning last week. That recognition breaks from the Kremlin's prior practices of never admitting to tactical failures, including the rationale for its troops' inability to advance on Kyiv in the first days of the invasion more than six months ago – a maneuver that Putin and his top advisers believed would topple the government in Kyiv in less than a week – or its withdrawal from Snake Island, a strategically critical point in the Black Sea.

“Kremlin sources are now working to clear Putin of any responsibility for the defeat, instead blaming the loss of almost all of occupied Kharkiv Oblast on underinformed military advisors within Putin's circle,” the institute noted in one of its regular analyses published late Tuesday.

It notes a member of the Kremlin's Council for Interethnic Relations, Bogdan Bezpalko, criticized Russian military leaders who “failed to see the concentration of Ukrainian troops and equipment and disregarded Telegram channels that warned of the imminent Ukrainian counter-offensive in Kharkiv Oblast should have their heads ‘lying on Putin's desk.’”

Putin delayed a meeting with his generals immediately after his forces' withdrawal from Kharkiv “increasing the appearance of a rift between the Kremlin and the Russian MoD,” the analysis notes.

“The Kremlin's admission of defeat in Kharkiv shows that Putin is willing and able to recognize and even accept a Russian defeat at least in some circumstances and focus on deflecting blame from himself.”

Ukraine's twin counteroffensives in recent days – in Kharkiv and another in the south near the Crimean Peninsula, which analysts originally believed was a feint to cover for the former – have compounded the existing problems facing Putin since his disastrous decision to invade on Feb. 24. Recent reports document [dramatic shortages](#) among his forces of equipment and logistical support along with a general unwillingness to fight. Russia has [resorted to desperate measures](#) to recruit new forces to send to the front, though it remains unclear how it can offset what the Pentagon earlier this week described as the “very hard problem to solve” that Ukraine and its Western backers have created for the invading army.

The question of Putin's own longevity has emerged amid persistent Western speculation that the stunning failures – and the embarrassing state of the Russian military that they have exposed – may prove too tough an obstacle for the autocratic Russian leader to remain in power.

Public support for the president remains firm, though it has wavered by some accounts.

Internal dissent has also risen. [The New York Times](#) reported on a petition by 40 local elected officials in Russia that ended with: “We demand the resignation of Vladimir Putin from the post of president of the Russian Federation!”

The institute also noted in its analysis that several members of the Russian State Duma, its lower house of parliament, expressed concern on Tuesday at a regular meeting, with Communist Party Leader Gennady Zyuganov calling on the Kremlin to call for a full mobilization of its military forces – something Putin's government has so far refrained from doing as a part of his insistence on referring to it only as a “special military operation,” not a “war.”

“We have no right to lose,” Zyuganov said.

Russia's latest defeat is “causing panic among Russians in occupied Ukrainian territories, servicemen, and milbloggers,” the analysis states, noting reports that Russian and Kremlin-backed officials in occupied Ukrainian territory are selling their houses and evacuating their families.

And it adds that Moscow's failures are weakening its position in other former Soviet territories of increased consequence in recent weeks. The Kremlin for example has so far declined to say whether it will fulfill treaty obligations to Armenia to provide military support for its ongoing violent territorial dispute with neighboring Azerbaijan.

"Russia's hedging approach may damage Russia's relationship with Armenia" and other treaty allies, it notes, "particularly If Russia cannot provide military or peacekeeping support."

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HEADLINE	09/15 Broad shift to remote work during pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-data-show-broad-shift-to-remote-work-during-pandemic-11663214461?mod=hp_featst_pos4
GIST	<p>The number of Americans working remotely more than tripled in 2021 from 2019, according to new federal data, and the trend shows signs of persisting this year.</p> <p>In 2021, 27.6 million people reported primarily working from home nationwide, up from 9 million in 2019, according to new 2021 American Community Survey estimates released Thursday by the Census Bureau. In percentage terms, that translated to 17.9% of employees who worked mainly remotely in 2021, compared with 5.7% in 2019. The vast majority of these are likely white-collar jobs; in many occupations such as those involving in-person customer interactions or operating machines, remote work isn't an option.</p> <p>Some metropolitan areas saw a far bigger share embrace remote work than the national average. More than 30% of workers in the metros of Boulder, Colo.; the San Francisco Bay Area; Washington, D.C.; Austin, Texas; Raleigh, N.C., and Seattle said they worked primarily from home. In some smaller cities, the share of remote workers undershot the national average. For example, in Baton Rouge, La.; Bakersfield, Calif., and Wichita, Kan., less than 10% of employees worked from home.</p> <p>Transit habits changed slightly, too, as workers got used to the new pandemic normal. Nearly 105 million people drove to work solo in 2021, down from 119 million in 2019. The number of people riding mass transit to work fell by more than half, to 3.8 million in 2021. Other modes of commuting—including carpooling, cycling or walking—also dropped in popularity, with one exception: in 2021, some 2.3 million people took a taxi, motorcycle or other means to work, up 4.1% from 2019.</p> <p>Overall, the average travel time to work for those not primarily at home dropped two minutes, to 25.6 minutes.</p> <p>Research by economists using a different survey shows that remote work adoption has persisted in 2022, despite a broad-based opening up of the U.S. economy after the most acute phase of the Covid pandemic.</p> <p>From April to August of 2022, about 30% of days were worked from home, compared with less than 5% before the pandemic, according to research by economists Jose Maria Barrero of Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Stanford's Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis of the University of Chicago. That share has come down steadily since May 2020, when more than 60% of days worked were remote. However, the figure has held steady since the spring of 2022, said Mr. Bloom—despite recent campaigns by many employers to get staff to work from the office more often.</p> <p>"A few high-profile firms talk in the media about pushing for greater return to the office after Labor Day, but the data shows no overall impact," he said. He added that the post-Labor Day push for a return to the office in both 2020 and 2021 failed to bring that share down—and that, so far, this year looks no different.</p> <p>"Labor Day 2022 is looking to be completely flat," said Mr. Bloom. "This is 3-0 to employees vs. employers in the battle to keep working from home."</p>

	<p>Private-sector data also point to a new equilibrium in the balance between remote and in-person work. Office occupancy across 10 major U.S. cities was 43.4% of March 2020 levels, on average, in early September, according to data from security provider Kastle Systems, which tracks badge swipes.</p> <p>Searches for job ads involving remote work on Indeed.com were 9.1% of all searches in August, nearly five times the share in February 2020. Around 8.8% of job postings on Indeed.com last month advertised remote work, up from 2.7%, on average, in 2019.</p> <p>“The factors that led to the immediate mass adoption of remote work have receded, but we’re still seeing remote work endure” said Nick Bunker, economic research director for North America at the Indeed Hiring Lab. “Now maybe there’s some shift from fully remote to hybrid, but the remote positions on offer are still pretty abundant.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 US withholds \$130M security aid to Egypt
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-withhold-130-million-in-security-aid-to-egypt-over-human-rights-concerns-11663198367?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Biden administration will withhold \$130 million in foreign security assistance to Egypt for a second time, symbolically penalizing Cairo for its human rights record while also aiming to maintain diplomatic ties with this Middle Eastern ally.</p> <p>The decision comes as some of President Biden’s closest Democratic allies in Congress have called for tougher measures against the government of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, including a full suspension of aid to Egypt.</p> <p>After temporarily freezing financial aid to Egypt last year for a review, Washington said in January it would “reprogram” \$130 million in security assistance to Egypt—a fraction of an estimated \$1.3 billion in aid the U.S. generally gives Egypt each year.</p> <p>The Biden administration has repeatedly called on Egypt to do more to protect the rights of political critics, members of civil society and journalists. The decision to withhold even a small amount of aid signaled a shift from the warmer ties Cairo had established with former President Donald Trump, who notably described Mr. Sisi as “my favorite dictator.”</p> <p>Mr. Biden, during his presidential campaign, blasted Egypt on Twitter for “arresting, torturing, and exiling activists” and pledged “No more blank checks for Trump’s “favorite dictator.” The Trump administration froze some military aid to Egypt in 2017 but released it the following year.</p> <p>In 2021, Mr. Sisi announced a new strategy aimed at protecting human rights and subsequently began releasing some political prisoners. Activists and American officials said the efforts didn’t go far enough.</p> <p>The administration on Wednesday said the decision to again withhold \$130 million comes as it looks to persuade Mr. Sisi’s regime to release additional political prisoners and continue working with the U.S. on issues of regional concern, such as ongoing Israeli-Palestinian tensions.</p> <p>“The approach taken here reflects the administration’s concerns about human rights and fundamental freedoms in Egypt while also seeking to present engagement and dialogue that we’ve had over the last 20 months not only to secure additional progress on human rights,” a senior administration official said.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Sen. Chris Murphy (D., Conn.), typically a reliable ally for Mr. Biden on foreign policy issues, criticized the administration for not penalizing Egypt more harshly despite what he said are its failures to improve its human rights record.</p> <p>“This was a big missed opportunity to stand up strongly and unequivocally for human rights,” Mr. Murphy said Monday.</p>

	<p>In 2020 and 2021, authorities detained, arrested and summoned more than 16,000 individuals for political reasons including participating in protests, according to Cairo-based research group Shafafia Center.</p> <p>Egyptian authorities have denied wrongdoing, although in recent months Mr. Sisi pledged a new human rights strategy. This April, he announced the formation of an amnesty committee to release certain prisoners.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Illinois emergency over bussed migrants
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/illinois-governor-declares-emergency-over-migrants-bused-from-texas-11663195787?mod=hp_listb_pos4
GIST	<p>CHICAGO—Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker declared an emergency and called up 75 members of the Illinois National Guard to marshal resources to cope with an influx of asylum seekers bused to Chicago and other cities by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.</p> <p>About 500 migrants have arrived in Chicago since the first busload pulled into a downtown bus station on Aug. 31, and more continue to arrive without any advance notice from Texas, officials said.</p> <p>“The state of Illinois is doing everything in its power to support local jurisdictions to help ensure that the right tools and supports are in place as we move forward with this humanitarian response,” Mr. Pritzker said at a news conference.</p> <p>His proclamation will help the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and other state agencies coordinate with the city of Chicago, Cook County, and other local governments, to provide services to the migrants, officials said. Services include transportation, emergency shelter and housing, food and medical attention.</p> <p>Mr. Pritzker criticized Mr. Abbott’s effort to ship migrants to New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, all Democratic-run cities that have declared themselves open to migrants, calling it “a stunt playing games with people’s lives.”</p> <p>Mr. Abbott took to Twitter to defend his policies earlier on Wednesday.</p> <p>“Sanctuary city mayors complain they are overwhelmed by a few dozen migrants arriving on buses from Texas,” he said. “It’s a fraction of what Texas faces on a daily basis. We will continue bussing migrants until Biden secures the border.”</p> <p>Illinois officials said they have asked Texas to send the migrants directly to centers set up to help the asylum seekers, but the buses instead are sent to a downtown bus station and sometimes arrive in the middle of the night, forcing officials to scramble each time a new bus arrives. They also are asking for federal help to manage the arrivals.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Russia economic war hits Europe factories
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-economic-war-hits-europes-factories-11663150511?mod=hp_major_pos2#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Factory production in Europe is faltering as the economic war between Russia and the West begins to chip away at the continent’s economic foundations.</p> <p>European Union data out Wednesday showed eurozone factory output had dropped by 2.3% in July from a month earlier, the first decline since March, partly reflecting cutbacks in energy-intensive sectors.</p>

Since invading Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has weaponized the country's vast stores of energy to undermine European support for Kyiv. This month, Russia turned off the taps to a key natural-gas pipeline, Nord Stream. As Wednesday's data showed, Moscow's choking of energy supplies to Europe has driven up production costs, making it harder for some manufacturers to operate economically.

Most economists expect Europe's main economies to contract in the coming months, with the severity of the recession dependent on average temperatures, progress in storing natural gas from non-Russian suppliers and the impact of government efforts to help households and industry.

"The darkest cloud on the horizon is clearly in the eurozone," said Marcelo Carvalho, global head of economics at BNP Paribas.

Europe's factories aren't alone in seeing a surge in costs as a consequence of the war. European households are also facing sharply higher utility bills.

Natural gas, which households use mainly for heating, and power have seen the biggest rises lately, while gasoline prices have eased. That helped push the U.K.'s annual rate of inflation down to 9.9% in July, from 10.1% in June, according to official data out Wednesday.

Despite the rise in energy prices, Europe was one of the global economy's stronger regions in the first half of this year. Data released Tuesday by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development showed the combined gross domestic product of the Group-of-20 largest economies—which account for about 80% of world output—fell in the three months through June. That was largely down to China, where lockdowns to contain the Covid-19 pandemic continue to come with a large economic cost, but the U.S. and India also contracted.

In contrast, the eurozone experienced a pickup in growth and a fall in its unemployment rate to a record low.

That pattern is set to flip as the year draws to a close. The removal of most pandemic restrictions means that southern Europe's tourism industry had its first normal summer since 2019, which may help the eurozone avoid a contraction in the three months through September.

However, most analysts expect the economy to contract in the final three months of the year and the first quarter of 2023, as energy usage rises because of low temperatures and prices remain high.

"Europe's energy crisis is all but certain to plunge the continent in a recession," said Mark Cus Babic, an economist at Barclays.

The depth of any contraction will depend on how high energy prices go, and whether Europe can avoid energy rationing, which could cause a wave of factory closures.

Economists at the European Central Bank estimate that a complete cutoff of Russian gas supplies could cause eurozone GDP to "decline sharply" in the final quarter of this year and the first quarter of next, contributing to a 0.9% contraction in 2023 as a whole.

However, much depends on natural-gas prices. Some price declines over recent days, as Ukraine's army has recovered some territory lost to Russia in the early months of the conflict, could point to a slightly smaller fall in output. Natural-gas prices peaked at more than 320 euros a megawatt hour—equivalent to around \$319—in late August, but slipped to below 200 euros this week.

"If prices were to settle well below €200 per MWh instead, the European recession could be shallower and the peak in inflation lower than we currently project," said Holger Schmieding, an economist at Berenberg Bank.

	So far, Mr. Putin's economic assault on Europe hasn't caused voters there to temper their support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia. A Politbarometer poll last week showed 70% of Germans continue to support Ukraine, even if this causes higher energy prices. Only 21% said the West should reduce its support so as to bring energy prices down.
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HEADLINE	09/14 Snohomish Co. eyes waste facility closures
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3636931/snohomish-county-prepares-waste-facility-closures-railway-transportation-issues/
GIST	<p>Issues with regional railway transportation and container shortages are again leading to an excess of solid waste in Snohomish County, as the county announced Wednesday that it is preparing for a possible temporary closure of its solid waste division.</p> <p>The county says the issue is similar to one it faced earlier this year, with excess garbage “piling up and prompting health, safety and environmental concerns for customers and staff,” county officials said.</p> <p>In May, solid waste facilities in Snohomish County were forced to close for two days to remove the excess waste that had built up due to a lack of intermodal containers to transport it to landfills.</p> <p>“We are experiencing significant delays in rail service by BNSF to the landfill, but safety will remain our number one priority throughout this emergency,” Snohomish County’s solid waste director, David Schonhard, said. “We are working on every possible option to reduce the refuse at our facilities without shutdowns, but it is difficult. We appreciate our customers’ patience during this uncertainty.”</p> <p>Railway workers with Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway are threatening to go on strike this Friday, jeopardizing Amtrak and Sounder train trips along with Snohomish County trash removal.</p> <p>“A strike would mean a complete closure of solid waste transfer stations and drop boxes because no refuse could be moved to landfills,” county officials said in a news release. “This would impact the weekly curbside pick-up of garbage, recycle and green waste for households and businesses.”</p> <p>The county is urging residents to remember “reduce, reuse, recycle” options, and to consider donating clothing or household items before throwing them away.</p> <p>In April, the solid waste division was awarded \$2 million to aid in the removal of excess garbage at area transfer stations.</p> <p>Garbage levels have been sustainable through the summer, but the county says they’ve recently begun to build up due to railway staffing issues and a lack of intermodal containers.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Equity: shopping carts Community Transit
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3636069/snohomish-county-transit-shopping-carts-transit-equity/
GIST	<p>Community Transit, the public transit authority for Snohomish County, has permitted shopping carts on certain buses after performing an equity analysis.</p> <p>The transit agency’s rules of conduct note that “personal carts, grocery carts, and bicycle trailers are allowed, provided they can be stored between seats without blocking the aisle.”</p> <p>Internal memos between community transit employees and Jacob Peltier, risk management manager with Community Transit, compared “personal carts” and “grocery carts” to baby strollers, making the point that “from an equity lens, it did not make sense to prohibit shopping carts or personal carts while allowing strollers based on the county’s equity review.”</p>

	<p>Clarification with Community Transit confirms that “full-sized shopping carts won’t be allowed on any bus that can’t accommodate them.” That would leave only Swift Coaches as a bus type with the capacity for grocery carts.</p> <p>According to Peltier, if the county were to see an increase in injuries related to shopping carts, the agency would then evaluate the need for a rule change.</p> <p>Community Transit serves more than 2,100 stops, and 22 park and ride lots – including the newer four-story Mountlake Terrace Transit Center near the King/Snohomish county line. Some routes run from Snohomish County into downtown Seattle and the Northgate light rail station. As of early this year, the system reported a ridership of 4.862 million – about 16,900 weekday riders. It’s considered the fourth largest transit agency in the greater Puget Sound region.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Insurers force change on police depts.
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/police-misconduct-insurance-settlements-reform/?itid=hp-top-table-main-t-2
GIST	<p>ST. ANN, Mo. — A patrol officer spotted a white minivan with an expired license plate, flipped on his lights and siren, and when the driver failed to stop, gave chase. The driver fled in rush-hour traffic at speeds of up to 90 mph, as other officers joined in the pursuit. Ten miles later, the van slammed into a green Toyota Camry, leaving its 55-year-old driver, Brent Cox, permanently disabled.</p> <p>That 2017 police chase was at the time the latest in a long line of questionable vehicle pursuits by officers of the St. Ann Police Department. Eleven people had been injured in 19 crashes during high-speed pursuits over the two prior years. Social justice activists and reporters were scrutinizing the department, and Cox and others were suing.</p> <p>Undeterred, St. Ann Police Chief Aaron Jimenez stood behind the high-octane pursuits and doubled down on the department’s decades-old motto: “St. Ann will chase you until the wheels fall off.”</p> <p>Then, an otherwise silent stakeholder stepped in. The St. Louis Area Insurance Trust risk pool — which provided liability coverage to the city of St. Ann and the police department — threatened to cancel coverage if the department didn’t impose restrictions on its use of police chases. City officials shopped around for alternative coverage but soon learned that costs would nearly double if they did not agree to their insurer’s demands.</p> <p>Jimenez’s attitude swiftly shifted: In 2019, 18 months after the chase that left Cox permanently disabled, the chief and his 48-member department agreed to ban high-speed pursuits for traffic infractions and minor, nonviolent crimes.</p> <p>“I didn’t really have a choice,” Jimenez said in an interview. “If I didn’t do it, the insurance rates were going to go way up. I was going to have to lose 10 officers to pay for it.”</p> <p>Where community activists, use-of-force victims and city officials have failed to persuade police departments to change dangerous and sometimes deadly policing practices, insurers are successfully dictating changes to tactics and policies, mostly at small to medium-size departments throughout the nation.</p> <p>The movement is driven by the increasingly large jury awards and settlements that cities and their insurers are paying in police use-of-force cases, especially since the 2020 deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Those cases led to settlements of \$12 million and \$27 million, respectively. Insurance companies are passing the costs — and potential future costs — on to their law enforcement clients.</p> <p>Larger law enforcement agencies — like the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department or the New York Police Department — handle it in different ways, often by creating a special fund to finance settlements or by</p>

paying those costs from the county's or city's general fund. This insulates them from external demands by insurers.

Departments with a long history of large civil rights settlements have seen their insurance rates shoot up by 200 to 400 percent over the past three years, according to insurance industry and police experts.

Even departments with few problems are experiencing rate increases of 30 to 100 percent. Now, insurers also are telling departments that they must change the way they police.

In St. Ann, the impact has been profound.

Since the retooling, which took effect in January 2019, the number of police pursuits annually has increased slightly, but crashes during pursuits have dropped: from 25 in 2018 with eight injuries to 10 in 2021 with three injuries, according to data provided by the department. So far this year, the department says, there have been three crashes with no injuries.

The forced changes prompted Jimenez to equip his patrol cars with new technology to help nab motorists who try to outrun police. Sticky darts containing GPS trackers are shot from the front of patrol cars onto the backs of vehicles that speed away, so officers can fall back and catch up with them later.

While dozens of arrests have been made using the GPS technology, overall arrests in the city have fallen more than 30 percent since the change. Jimenez attributes that drop primarily to officers' inability to chase motorists for minor infractions. "If you're a proactive police department and you go out there and you search for a crime, your stats are higher because you're fighting crime, you're chasing more cars, you're making more arrests," he said.

John Chasnoff, a local activist who fought for years to get St. Ann to retool its chase policy, said he is dismayed that the catalyst for change was money — not the injuries to people including Cox.

"It's an indictment on St. Ann police and their priorities that the voice of their insurers spoke louder than human lives," Chasnoff said.

The insurer's demands for St. Ann police also affected departments beyond this blue-collar town of about 13,000 people. The city is just one of a dozen in the St. Louis risk pool, which has required each city to overhaul its police pursuit policy.

There is no public data tracking how many police departments have made policy changes at the behest of their insurers. But the changes are widespread, affecting thousands of departments, according to interviews with more than two dozen insurance analysts, police reform experts and a review of hundreds of pages of insurance documents.

In Vallejo, Calif., the city's insurance risk pool threatened in 2017 to end coverage because of mounting police use-of-force claims unless officials agreed to a higher deductible — a jump from \$500,000 per claim to \$2.5 million per claim. The city instead joined a high-risk insurance pool in California. Because of increased demand from troubled departments for its services, the California group has begun offering coverage nationwide. Vallejo officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Entire states are having to adjust to insurers' demands. In New Mexico, the largest risk pool — which provides coverage for one-third of the state's police officers — hired an instructor last year to travel the state and retrain officers in de-escalation skills after private insurance rates climbed by more than 60 percent. The risk pool that insures 30 of the state's 33 sheriff departments also saw coverage shrink while rates shot up 50 percent over the past three years because of police use-of-force claims.

Across the country, allegations over police conduct are often settled by departments at taxpayers' expense: A Post investigation in March documented more than \$3.2 billion spent over the past decade to resolve nearly 40,000 claims at 25 of the nation's largest police and sheriff's departments.

Concerns about insuring troubled departments have been building for years.

In 2009, a local insurance risk pool warned the 60-officer Maywood Police Department in California that it would lose its coverage if it did not enact more than a dozen changes focused on reducing violent encounters with the public. When police failed to do so, the risk pool pulled its coverage, and the department disbanded.

“When the officers had to turn over their badges and radios for the final inspection the last day, it was the most emotional thing I’ve ever experienced in my law enforcement career,” said Frank Hauptmann, who was Maywood police chief at the time. “When we did our final salute, each officer had tears streaming down their faces.”

For some police departments, insurers are refusing even to provide initial coverage unless they change their policies on a variety of matters including body cameras and chokeholds, according to industry experts.

“I’ve been doing this for 40 years, and this represents a major shift,” said John Chino, a broker who secures insurance for cities and counties in six states. “They are asking lots of very detailed questions. ‘Do they use chokeholds? What does their de-escalation training look like?’ If they aren’t doing something on the list, they are required to get it if they want coverage.”

More claims, fewer insurers

These forced changes are taking place at police departments in neighboring cities and counties that work together to create insurance risk pools. Their collective buying power helps them secure lower rates.

Members pay a “contribution” to the pool to provide a first layer of coverage, but most pools also purchase additional coverage on the private market.

For police departments within these pools, the serious risks they may take can also drive up rates and deductibles for other members. Because of this, the pool may threaten to expel a city, county or township if its police department refuses to take steps to minimize risk.

“The members help police themselves,” said Alexander T. Brown, a lawyer who specializes in insurance settlements for civil rights plaintiffs. “It’s a joint self-insurance program, and they are motivated to keep the pools solvent because it’s the members’ own money.”

Working with insurers, cities and counties often will write checks to settle claims of police misconduct to avoid the additional costs of fighting the allegations in court. The increased scrutiny of police has led them to settle cases more quickly to avoid jurors who also may now be more likely to second-guess officers and their tactics.

“It’s been such a shift, and it’s happened so quickly,” said Izaak Schwaiger, an attorney who has settled dozens of civil rights lawsuits for plaintiffs against police. “The last time I went to a settlement conference, the city basically told me they were going to capitulate to what I demanded. That never used to happen before.”

Chino, the insurance broker who operates in six states, said settlement negotiations that once took years now take months. And the payouts have skyrocketed. “The settlement for Breonna Taylor was \$12 [million]; that would have been \$2 million just a few years ago,” he said.

As a result, the number of insurers willing to provide coverage for police departments with a history of large settlements is shrinking.

Ben Eggert, a lawyer who represents municipalities in claims and settlements, said that five or six years ago, brokers such as Chino orchestrated bidding wars between insurers for coverage. “There was tremendous competition,” he said. “The insurance broker could play the different insurance entities off one another.”

Now that the power has shifted to the insurer, some have wondered whether this actually could threaten public safety.

Steve Hebbe, the immediate-past president of the New Mexico Association of Chiefs of Police, said he believes it is a conflict of interest for insurers to be crafting department policies. Some of the riskiest calls to which patrol officers respond — domestic violence, threats of suicide or disorderly conduct — might be curtailed or eliminated by insurers, he said.

“Their goal is to have no injuries or accidents, but that isn’t realistic, and that isn’t policing,” Hebbe said. “We send officers to do dangerous things that other people don’t want to do. Their profits are hurt by the risky things we do.”

A tipping point in Springfield

In Springfield, Ore., complaints and settlements involving excessive force by police became so costly two years ago that the city’s insurance risk pool, Citycounty Insurance Services, was given oversight of overhauling the 82-member police department.

The tipping point came on March 31, 2019, when Springfield officers shot and killed Stacy Kenny, an unarmed 33-year-old motorist with schizophrenia who had been pulled over because she was exhibiting “weird” behavior, records show. (The Post previously reported on Kenny’s death).

A 911 recording captured the encounter that began with Kenny begging an emergency operator to explain why police had stopped her. Kenny then can be heard screaming. Officers smashed the windows of her red Nissan, used a Taser on her twice, punched her in the face more than a dozen times and tried to pull her out of her car by her hair, police and court records show.

But Kenny was anchored to the car by a locked seat belt. Her life ended when she tried to flee by driving away with one of the officers still inside the car. On the recording, there’s a burst of gunfire, then an officer says: “We are all okay. Bad guy down.”

Kenny had legally changed her gender but presented as male, so officers believed she was a man.

Her parents filed a wrongful death claim and sued the city. Barbara and Chris Kenny said that as they pressed for answers, they discovered serious deficiencies with the department’s process for reviewing violent police encounters. Officers involved in the fatal incident later testified in depositions that the department never conducted an internal investigation of the shooting.

“A human being died that night and all they did was issue a one-page crappy memo. We asked ourselves, ‘How do we prevent this from happening to someone else in the future?’ ” Barbara Kenny said. “It felt like we had the opportunity to make a difference because what happened was so egregious.”

The Kennys told city officials during settlement negotiations that any agreement would need to include a plan for systemic use-of-force reforms and anti-bias training that would help officers better deal with minorities and people with mental disabilities. They insisted that an external monitor — not a city employee — provide unbiased progress reports on the changes.

As the city and Citycounty Insurance Services negotiated the settlement with the Kennys in summer 2020, city officials learned that the cost of insuring police in the community of 64,000 residents was about to spike.

Misconduct and employment claims against Springfield police over the past five years totaled \$8.5 million, of which the risk pool had paid at least \$2 million, according to city records and court documents.

The city's deductible would jump from \$100,000 to \$250,000 for each claim filed against the police department "due to several large police and jail claims in recent years," according to city records.

The city's insurance broker, Ron Cutter, looked elsewhere for coverage, but only Citycounty Insurance Services was willing to offer a policy, records show.

Cutter told city Risk Manager Ted Mogleston in an email that the city did not "have a ton of leverage to negotiate" a set of changes the risk pool was requiring for contract renewal, and Cutter hoped that did not give the police chief "any heartburn." Mogleston declined interview requests. Cutter did not respond to requests for comment.

Weeks later, one of Springfield's police officers was recorded on video laughing about a teenage protester being injured during a protest march, on July 29, 2020, according to a lawsuit filed by Civil Liberties Defense Center, a legal organization that defends activists in civil rights cases. The lawsuit alleges that police caused the injury.

"We finally did something!" officer Daniel Casarez can be heard saying on the video recording, as he and another officer laugh in the background at the protest, organized by Black Unity, a local police abolition group. "That stupid 12-year-old [inaudible] took it right in the f---in' face ... at least we f--- n' took a stand, just once."

Later that night, counterprotesters swarmed in and hit the Black Unity protesters with their fists, a flashlight and a flagpole, city records and video show. Police failed to intervene that night, according to an independent review of the episode commissioned by the city.

"There has long been a cowboy culture in the department," said Lauren Regan, an attorney with the Civil Liberties Defense Center that filed the lawsuit on behalf of Black Unity protesters. The lawsuit, which named former police chief Richard L. Lewis and 25 officers including Casarez, seeks numerous changes at the department, including establishment of a new hiring committee that will include people of color and civilians from the community.

Casarez declined to comment, and his attorneys did not respond to calls seeking comment. Police Chief Andrew Shearer, who took over the department last year, said he could not comment on pending litigation.

In September 2020, with the approval of the Springfield City Council and the city manager, the insurance risk pool agreed to pay the Kennys \$4.55 million — the largest police settlement in the history of Oregon.

The city also met the family's other demands: In addition to de-escalation training and a new process for reviewing use-of-force incidents, the city agreed to create an awards program that recognizes officers who peacefully resolve potentially perilous encounters with civilians. The department also agreed to adopt a policy stating that officers "value and preserve human life" and "strive to use the minimum force necessary to accomplish their lawful objectives."

The city appointed its insurer to monitor the changes, something the Kennys' attorney, Dave Park, said he had never seen in his 40 years of litigating police civil rights cases.

To the Kennys, it made perfect sense.

"I couldn't understand why the insurance company wasn't mad as hell at the department," said Barbara Kenny. "They were the ones who had to keep paying out. They seemed like a natural partner for us on reforms. If we made the department better, don't you think the costs would go down?"

In June 2021, when Springfield officials took steps to renew the police department's insurance coverage, Citycounty Insurance Services doubled the deductible the city had to pay per claim from \$250,000 to \$500,000 — and gave them an ultimatum.

"Should the City see police and jail claims with the same frequency and severity as experience[sic] during the last 10 years, we will either be dropped from coverage, or general liability claim costs are anticipated to increase an average \$300,000 annually for the foreseeable future," Mugleston wrote in a memo to city council members on June 7, 2021.

This summer, however, city council members were told that there would be no additional increase in Springfield's deductibles for fiscal 2022-2023, records show.

Citycounty Insurance Services declined to be interviewed. In a statement, Dave Nelson, a deputy director with the risk pool, credited city officials, including Shearer, with "the hard work necessary to change the culture in the police department. The change in leadership has made a significant difference."

Since assuming oversight of the overhauls, the insurance risk pool has required dozens of additional changes, including an updated cadet screening process to preemptively root out rogue officers. But accusations of misconduct persist.

Springfield Officer Brian Bragg, who is named in the Black Unity lawsuit, was accused in June of using excessive force.

At an abortion rights protest in a neighboring town, Bragg allegedly smashed a baton into a female protester's sternum. Another officer was recorded on video telling her to leave to avoid being struck again. Shearer said he has ordered an internal affairs investigation of the matter. Bragg and his lawyer did not return calls seeking comment.

"There's definitely a toxic warrior culture that has permeated SPD [Springfield Police Department] and been a driving factor there," said Brittney de Alicante, a member of the Springfield Police Advisory Committee, which acts as a liaison between the community and the department. "When it's that deeply embedded into your culture, it's a really hard cycle to break."

Shearer said there has been measurable improvement. A recent report from the chief to the city council shows that from 2020 to 2021, the number of use-of-force incidents dropped from 229 to 190. Shearer acknowledges, however, that more needs to be done, and the insurance risk pool continues to identify problems that he said he is working to address. The more active role of insurers, he said, has also changed the nature of the job for police chiefs.

"Frankly, there's a hammer there because it's costing the city a lot of money," Shearer said in an interview. "Most police chiefs, when they take their job, they really think on a much wider scale: 'How can I create a community that is safe and reduce crime rates and build trust in our community?' But to have the actual dollar figure of the insurance rates at the front of their mind? That's a relatively new problem."

'You're not out here'

At dusk one day last summer, St. Ann Detective Daniel Rice pulled his car into a gravelly median along Interstate 70, which cuts through the city and is an ideal spot for catching speeding motorists.

Rice said some drivers think the cover of night will allow them to freely rocket down the highway with fraudulent plates and outstanding warrants. Because of the changes imposed by insurers, catching them now is harder, he said, something that he and other St. Ann officers resent.

“An insurance company should have nothing to do with a police department’s policy,” Rice said, adding that insurance representatives should spend time in the field with patrol officers. “You’re not out here, and you don’t know what’s really going on.”

In interviews, several officers said that on average, two motorists a week now successfully flee when officers try to pull them over. Word is out that St. Ann police don’t chase people as they used to.

“It builds their confidence, so they keep doing it over and over,” Officer Benjamin Freet said of drivers who refuse to stop.

How much the city has been forced to pay out over police pursuits since the policy revamp is unclear. St. Ann City Manager Matt Conley said he cannot determine the full cost because city officials neither handle nor track settlements. “I don’t keep any of the paperwork; the risk pool does,” he said in an interview.

Because St. Louis Area Insurance Trust risk pool is a private entity, it does not have to disclose settlement costs, although its funding comes from taxpayers and its board of directors comprises city managers, including Conley. Officials with the pool did not respond to calls and emails seeking comment.

“It may not be nefarious, but they are concealing a lot of information that should be public,” said John Rappaport, a law professor at the University of Chicago who has studied insurance risk pools.

Despite the drop in the number of crashes, Chief Jimenez said he still believes that police chases, even for minor traffic infractions, are justified. If people are fleeing from police for expired license tags, he said they usually have other legal problems — outstanding warrants, unregistered weapons or illegal drugs.

He thinks the mere fear of a chase by St. Ann police in the past kept criminals away.

“I’ve not been advertising that our policy has changed,” Jimenez said. “I have to follow the times and listen to the insurance company, [but] I think this will wreak havoc on our communities. I still wish we could use it.”

Since the overhaul, arrests have declined from about 900 to 600 annually. Major crimes reported have remained unchanged, records show.

Jimenez said he thinks that the pandemic has had an impact on the arrest numbers but that the drop in arrests is largely driven by the policy change.

“It’s because we’re not being able to chase them,” Jimenez said. “When someone is fleeing, 90 percent of the time it isn’t because of a traffic violation. When we stop them, we find guns, drugs, outstanding warrants.”

In St. Ann, the vehicle tracking system — called “StarChase” — allows officers to tag and track fleeing suspects without engaging in high-speed chases.

Officers fall back and, using the GPS coordinates, later catch up with suspects when they park. So far, St. Ann police officials say 58 arrests have been made using the technology, including one in June following a “road rage” incident. Officers let the suspect flee and later tracked her to a ditch where she had crashed her SUV, records show. The technology is not perfect — officers have to be close enough

to hit the target, and weather and the surface of the fleeing vehicle can inhibit the dart's ability to attach. But Freet and other officers say that overall, they like the technology.

"You should see the look on their face when we pull up," Freet said of those who flee the police and are tracked down. "They think they've outrun us."

The revamp forced one other change in St. Ann: the motto.

Police no longer claim to chase "until the wheels fall off," Jimenez said.

"One of the things I've had to come to terms with is, since we changed our pursuits, our accidents are way down. We are doing a better job of keeping the public and our officers safe."

Cox, the injured motorist whose case helped trigger the changes in St. Ann, said the entire ordeal with police felt like something from a bygone era. The high-speed pursuit that left him drifting in and out of a coma for about a week started when police began chasing a motorist with an expired license plate — one that was overdue by only three weeks.

"It was like something from the '20s and '30s where you chase the bad guy in the car through town," said Cox, who is now 60 and settled with the city for an undisclosed amount this year. Cox said that because of the crash he was unable to continue working as an auto mechanic. He said he has metal plates in his back and left ankle and has permanent nerve damage, chronic problems with his digestive tract and persistent back pain.

"I'm lucky to be alive."

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HEADLINE	09/15 'Tentative' deal reached to avert rail strike
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/09/15/rail-strike-deal-agreement-biden/
GIST	<p>The White House on Thursday morning announced it had reached a "tentative" agreement to avert a national rail strike that threatened the nation's economy.</p> <p>President Biden said in a statement that the agreement would guarantee "better pay, improved working conditions, and peace of mind around their health care costs" for the workers.</p> <p>Negotiators had until Friday at 12:01 a.m. to reach a deal to avoid a major impact to the economy.</p> <p>A Department of Labor official confirmed that a deal "that balances the needs of workers, businesses, and our nation's economy" was reached early Thursday morning after 20 consecutive hours of negotiations between rail companies and union negotiators.</p> <p>"Secretary Walsh and the Biden administration applaud all parties for reaching this hard-fought, mutually beneficial deal," a labor official said. "Our rail system is integral to our supply chain, and a disruption would have had catastrophic impacts on industries, travelers and families across the country."</p> <p>At issue were the rail carriers' attendance policies, which conductors and engineers said punish them, and put them at risk of termination, for attending to routine doctor's visits and family emergencies. Two of the largest and most politically powerful unions representing railroad workers said they strike if the carriers did not allow them to call out of work.</p> <p>The details of the tentative agreement have not been shared.</p> <p>The tentative deal caps a frenzy of work at the highest levels of the U.S. government to prevent a strike that would have significantly disrupted the nation's supply chains.</p>

	<p>Biden faced pressure in recent days to ensure the strike was avoided while not undercutting the union workers who he vowed to defend as president.</p> <p>White House aides had prepared contingency plans aimed at protecting the nation's drinking and energy systems in case of an emergency.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/15 Ukraine pushes Putin further back in corner
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/15/ukraine-advance-putin-counteroffensive-mcmaster/
GIST	<p>The war in Ukraine may be entering a decisive new phase. The past week saw the stunning success of Ukrainian counteroffensive into the environs of the northeast city of Kharkiv, routing Russian forces across a vast stretch of territory extending as far as the Russian border. In addition to considerable casualties, Russian troops lost significant amounts of materiel, including dozens of tanks and armored vehicles. A resident of one liberated town described the Russian retreat to my colleagues as so hasty that “their pants were flying off.”</p> <p>Not since the initial stages of Russia's invasion of its neighbor — when dogged Ukrainian defenders repulsed Russian columns moving on the capital Kyiv — has there been this level of optimism surrounding Ukraine's capacity for victory. On Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky went to the retaken city of Izyum and hailed his compatriots on the front lines. “The heroes are here,” Zelensky said at a flag-raising ceremony. “It means that the enemy is gone, ran away.”</p> <p>Russia has cast its losses as part of a strategic “regroup.” But it's clear to analysts that the latest Ukrainian offensive has exposed some of the mounting problems within the Russian war effort, hampered by organizational frailties not anticipated by many Western military experts before the Russian invasion began.</p> <p>“A lot of the key elements of a strong defense are the capabilities of your soldiers, the capabilities of logistics, and command, and we've seen fractures in all of those elements, and they played out in many places over time in the east,” a senior U.S. defense official told my colleagues.</p> <p>The recent successes have also offered another demonstration of Ukrainian prowess and daring. “It's too early to say whether this is a turning point in the war,” a Western official told Britain's Economist, “but it's a moment which has power in terms of both operations, logistics and psychology. ... Ukraine has demonstrated impressive operational art.”</p> <p>Many of Ukraine's supporters hope Kyiv can press its advantage. Even as Ukrainian forces consolidate their gains in the northeast, they are hoping to take further ground in the southern Kherson region. Experts believe Russia is on the back foot, reeling from recent setbacks, facing exhaustion, slumping morale and the steady deterioration of its combat effectiveness.</p> <p>“What we are seeing around Kharkiv is the psychological breaking point of certain Russian forces,” said Gen. H.R. McMaster, former White House national security adviser in the Trump administration. McMaster was speaking at a Monday roundtable at Stanford University hosted by the Hoover Institution, a right-leaning think tank, where Today's WorldView was present.</p> <p>McMaster called for increase in arms and military equipment deliveries to Ukraine, including heavy armor and tanks demanded by Kyiv, to “maintain momentum and initiative.” He also suggested that Ukraine's allies help the country “project power in greater depth across the Black Sea,” forcing the Russian fleet away from Ukraine's coast and making Russian bases in annexed Crimea “untenable” with the threat of missile strikes.</p> <p>Russia was so vulnerable, McMaster quipped, that “I think the Lithuanian army could march on St. Petersburg right now.”</p>

That's not happening, of course. President Biden cautioned this week that talk of victory was premature and that the war was "going to be a long haul." Zelensky [acknowledged](#) how "extremely difficult" the fighting around Kharkiv had been for his nation's troops and urged the soldiers he addressed Wednesday to take care of themselves as they ready for new battles to come.

Russian President Vladimir Putin now faces a narrower, more stark set of options in litigating the war of his choosing. For months, Putin has [clung to fictions](#) of inevitable triumph over Ukraine's "artificial" state and peddled contradictory storylines to his countrymen — that the war they are waging is an existential battle for Russia's future and yet also a mere "special operation" that the Kremlin has well at hand. The edifice of Putin's propaganda has started to crumble, and he finds himself in a scenario where he cannot countenance defeat nor pursue a decisive victory.

Ultrnationalist radicals close to the Kremlin are grouching over the defeats in Kharkiv and calling for drastic measures, including even a general mobilization of the Russian public. "In a sign of the pressure on Putin from pro-war hard-liners for tougher action, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a longtime Putin ally, on Wednesday called for martial law and mandatory military mobilization, moves so far ruled out by the Kremlin," [noted my colleague Robyn Dixon](#).

"Putin certainly has the will to continue this war, but he has been largely operating under the illusion that the Russian military was winning and would eventually win," said Michael Kofman, director of Russian studies at Arlington-based Center for Naval Analyses, [to my colleagues](#). Once that illusion is dispelled, the political costs may rise for the entrenched autocrat.

"Many Russians have been fairly lukewarm in terms of either supporting or not caring about this war, seeing their lives as largely unaffected because they believe that their kids will not be sent to fight," Kofman said. "People's attitudes really change if they think their kids will be sent to fight."

Meanwhile, Putin himself seems mired in strategic confusion and increasingly isolated. "Putin is completely unclear about where we are going, what our goals are and how we're going to win," political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya told Robyn. "He has detached himself from the elites. And following Putin, without knowing where we are going, can't last forever."

One perennially looming question is whether Putin would resort to unthinkable measures, choosing to deploy a nuclear weapon as his ability to defeat Ukraine diminishes. Michael McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, argued at the same Hoover roundtable that Putin isn't "that crazy." A nuclear attack would make him a "global pariah" and likely collapse relations with countries that have remained relatively cordial with Moscow, like China and India.

In invading Ukraine, McFaul sees Putin repeating the ill-fated maneuver of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, who sought to conquer Afghanistan in 1980, only to end up mired in a long war that prefigured the U.S.S.R.'s dissolution.

"This is the end of Putinism," McFaul said, though he cautioned it's unclear when Putin will actually fall. McMaster, meanwhile, argued that no Western government should look to compel the warring parties to a compromise that could allow Putin to save face. "For Putin, any off-ramp is to look for the next on-ramp," he said.

"A new reality has been created: The Ukrainians could win this war," [wrote the Atlantic's Anne Applebaum](#). She added: "We must expect that a Ukrainian victory, and certainly a victory in Ukraine's understanding of the term, also brings about the end of Putin's regime."

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HEADLINE	09/14 AAA: book holiday flights early
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/14/aaa-warns-travelers-book-holiday-flights-now-airfa/

GIST	<p>Auto owners club AAA is urging travelers to book holiday flights as soon as possible, warning that airfares and cancellations are poised to surge for Thanksgiving and Christmas.</p> <p>In an advisory issued Wednesday, AAA noted that staffing and other pandemic-related issues have forced airlines to reduce the number of routes and seats they offer. Airfares have increased 20% in the past year and “will likely continue to rise in the coming months,” the group added.</p> <p>“Booking holiday travel now should help to address all of these issues,” said Ragina Cooper Ali, AAA spokesperson for Maryland and Washington, D.C. “By booking air travel now, flyers afford themselves greater choice and greater flexibility, increasing the opportunity for a positive, stress-free travel experience.”</p> <p>AAA suggests for booking holiday flights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for early morning flights, allowing more flexibility in the event of delays or cancellations. Try to fly a day or two early to avoid losing the trip to flight disruptions. • Schedule long layovers to allow for unexpected delays and buy travel insurance. Review the airline’s rebooking policies. • Check in at least 24 hours in advance, bringing both a printed boarding pass and e-ticket to the airport. Enroll in TSA pre-screening for faster, quicker lines. • Arrive two hours before domestic flights and three hours before international flights. Download the airline’s app and the Flight Aware app to track actual and potential delays. <p>According to AAA, airfare will hit an all-time high as it reaches pre-pandemic levels this holiday season. The busiest and most expensive travel days are typically the day before Thanksgiving and the days leading up to Christmas.</p> <p>For Thanksgiving, the average domestic airfare will be around \$350, with international round trips averaging \$795.</p> <p>Christmas falls on a weekend this year, driving the average cost of round-trip domestic tickets up to \$463, more than in 2019. International round trips will average up to \$1,300.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/15 Lebanon, Syria join forces to fight wildfires
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/sep/15/volunteer-firefighters-lebanon-wildfires-akkar-province
GIST	<p>Some of the trees in Akkar province are more than 100 years old, says Mohammed Abdallah. A refugee from the war just over the border in Syria, Abdallah has come to know the forests of northern Lebanon well and has spent recent days putting out a persistent blaze that threatened ancient woodland near Qabeit.</p> <p>He is one of 80 men and women of the First Responders team of Jurd al-Qayteh, drawn from 15 villages in Akkar, the region’s largest volunteer firefighting unit. Wildfires are responsible for 26% of tree loss in Lebanon over the past 20 years. Rising temperatures and poor forest management have contributed to an increase this year in a season that lasts about 18 weeks through to late September. With the country in economic crisis, emergency services like firefighters are in disarray.</p> <p>“I don’t have any land or trees of my own, but I wanted to get involved and help save the forests,” says Abdallah, a carpenter who came to Lebanon with his family in 2012 to escape the war.</p> <p>Mohammed Zakaria, director of First Responders, says funding fire services isn’t a priority for Lebanon’s government. “Our nearest fire brigade has one vehicle covering 15 villages, and it’s too big to access deeper parts of the forest.”</p>

Satellite images of Akkar studied by the University of Balamand showed more than 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres) were destroyed by fire last year.

Raymond Khattar, head of the civil defence – Lebanon’s frontline rescue force – said 95% of forest fires are caused “whether on purpose or not” by people burning wood for cooking and heating.

“The people are heavily affected by the fires. They are losing their farmlands and their heritage,” says Rayane al-Ahmad, a student and First Responder.

The group, with training from the civil defence, began patrols this summer. “We learned how to enter the forest carefully and strategically, without endangering ourselves. We’re not replacing the fire brigade; we’re here to help them,” says Abdallah.

Khaled Taleb, founder of Akkar Trail, an eco-tourism agency, set up a volunteer team in 2020 after watching a blaze destroy woods near his home.

“We set up WhatsApp groups so that people can warn us of a fire in their area,” he says. “We have two pickup trucks ready to be deployed.”

Taleb believes his team is more effective than traditional firefighters. “Our vehicles are smaller and our equipment is lighter, which gives us faster and better access into the forest.”

The volunteers are also improving community relations – Syria’s war drove about 1.5 million refugees into Lebanon and Akkar hosts most of them. Lebanon’s own economic crash began in 2019 and has driven [more than 80%](#) of the population into poverty, creating new tensions. In July, a Syrian refugee camp in Akkar [was torched](#) after a dispute with local people.

“The group [First Responders] has broken the barrier between Syrians and Lebanese,” says Abdallah, “We drink the same water, live under the same trees and eat the same bread.”

Zakaria agrees: “When Syrians joined us to put out fires, we all felt a strong sense of hope that we were part of the same land, and that we can help each other.”

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HEADLINE	09/15 ‘Russia here forever’ allies flee Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/15/ukraine-russia-local-allies-flee
GIST	<p>Just weeks ago, Irina was working in the Russian occupation administration in Kupiansk, a large town in northern Ukraine that had been captured days after Vladimir Putin launched his war against the country.</p> <p>But then, as Russian troops fled the city and the Ukrainian army retook occupied territories in the country’s north, she and her family fled what they expected would be swift punishment for collaborating with the Russian invasion force.</p> <p>Evidence emerging from the newly retaken territories indicates that Russian troops regularly used violence to put down any local dissent and maintain control. At the same time, some have said they welcomed and helped the Russians. Others listened to the insistence by Moscow-installed officials that they were there to stay for ever and decided to cooperate or simply try to live quietly under Russian rule.</p> <p>For Moscow’s local allies, the sudden retreat of the Russian forces, who ceded some villages and towns with little resistance, was a turnaround bordering on betrayal.</p> <p>“Everyone had told us we’re here now, we’re here, you have nothing to be afraid of,” said Irina, recalling promises from officials sent by Moscow. She had taken a job in the accounting department of the new local administration installed by Russia, she said. “Five days ago they were telling us they would never</p>

leave. And three days later we were under shelling ... And we don't understand anything [about the offensive].

"We don't understand what the point of this is then," she said of the Russian military operation.

For months, Russia told people in Ukraine's occupied regions that it was there to stay. The rouble was introduced, retired people were told they would get Russian pensions, and pro-Russian residents were hired into the ranks of government workers.

"The fact is obvious that Russia is never leaving," said Andrei Turchak, a leader of Russia's governing United Russia party, during a visit to Kupiansk in July. "Russia will never leave here. And all the necessary aid will be provided."

That vow, along with the threat of violence, was crucial to project Moscow's power into the towns and villages of Ukraine by ensuring willing locals that they would never have to face punishment as traitors or collaborators.

Now Russia's retreat has dealt a devastating blow to the image of the Russian armed forces and the Kremlin among some of their most willing supporters in Ukraine.

Ukraine has vowed to catch locals who collaborated with the Russian army or cooperated with Russian-installed governments. Cases can carry a prison sentence of up to 15 years. President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Wednesday that Ukrainian forces were seeking to root out "remnants of occupiers and sabotage groups" in the reclaimed towns and villages of the Kharkiv region.

In Belgorod, a Russian region that borders Kharkiv, the governor's office has said nearly 1,400 people are housed at a temporary camp after crossing the border from Ukraine. Many are families with children who have fled fighting. Hundreds more people are likely staying in rented apartments or with relatives.

At a small aid distribution centre in the city, a half-dozen Ukrainians who had recently fled to Russia said they were dumbfounded by Moscow's inability to hold on to the Kharkiv region and withstand the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive that has retaken 8,000 sq km (3,100 sq miles) of territory in just several weeks.

"People there believed the Russian troops, they said we won't leave you, that we lost so many people and we won't leave you," said Alexander, 44, who fled from a nearby village with his wife and son. "Then they suddenly retreated. They took several months to gather all this territory and then they abandoned it in two days. They don't understand what happened."

Alexander, a trained pipe welder, said that he had not worked for Russia and hadn't been employed since the war began. He had wanted to leave his village, which quickly fell to Russia in the early days of the war, because he "didn't have either work or a school, and I need to dress my child and send him to school".

They had planned to join a brother in Poland, but then Alexander was wounded by a shell, and they fled to stay with a relative in Russia instead.

They left, he said, not because they opposed a return to Ukrainian rule, but because of the danger from the war. "It was driving us to hysteria," he said. "We took it for as long as we could."

Like others, he asked not to be identified by his last name. He feared he could be seen as a traitor for having fled to Russia. He said he still hoped to return home to visit his parents in Ukraine.

Moscow's efforts to integrate the territories by publicly offering handouts while enforcing a culture of fear in occupied Ukraine was seen as a prelude to a formal annexation that could be held in some regions as soon as this autumn.

But the lack of security signalled by Russia's sudden retreat has also shaken the trust that some had and makes that more difficult in the territories that Moscow continues to hold.

"We should have left earlier," said Sergei, Irina's boyfriend, who worked on the local railway. It was now difficult to find any place to stay in Belgorod, he said, where thousands of people have moved since the beginning of the war.

Irina and Sergei both said they still supported Russia in the war but had less faith that it could protect supporters in Ukraine.

"Now I'm worried for people in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia," said Irina, referring to the regions in southern Ukraine also occupied by Russia. "They're also being told 'We're not going to leave.' But if you look at what happened near Kharkiv, then no one can say what's going to happen tomorrow."

By many accounts, Russian troops themselves and some of the Kremlin's top boosters have come out saying that Russia is in danger of losing its supporters in occupied Ukraine.

"People here are waiting for us to get started," said Alexander Sladkov, a Russian war correspondent, in a televised report. "For us to hit them so hard that they end up on their backsides. That's to say a knockout. It's very difficult to win on points. We're losing a huge number of people, we have wounded."

Catching himself, he added: "And we have great successes."

Russia has not had much success lately. And its troubles may grow further as towns that have been held by Russia since the first weeks of the war begin to emerge from isolation and tell stories of life under occupation.

It also set off an exodus of people for the border. Earlier this week, Yulia Nemchinova, a local activist who delivers aid to Ukrainian refugees in Russia, filmed a video of some of the hundreds of cars that had fled from Kharkiv region at the Russian border.

A Ukrainian official described one such convoy from the Luhansk region as collaborators "packing their loot, packing their families, and leaving". Nemchinova, who has pro-Russian views, confirmed that many inside feared being labelled as collaborators, although she described them as locals who she said were "just trying to live".

"People were told that Russia is here for ever," she said. "They were in shock. People were just black. They were literally the colour black. I asked people where are they going, they said: to Russia. Just nowhere. Just to cross the border."

At the aid centre, most said they would only return to Ukraine if Russia retook the territory. Others said they would never return at all, even if Russia returns.

"We'll never go back," said Sergei, Irina's boyfriend, who was carrying a small bag with shoes and sweaters from the aid centre. "There's nothing for us to go back to."

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HEADLINE	09/15 Day 204 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/15/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-204-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, was involved in a traffic accident in Kyiv, but he is not seriously hurt, his spokesperson said in a Facebook post early on Thursday. Serhii Nykyforov, who did not say when the accident occurred, said Zelenskiy's car had collided with a private vehicle. "The president was examined by a doctor, no serious injuries were found," he

	<p>said, adding the accident would be investigated. Medics accompanying Zelenskiy gave the driver of the private car emergency aid and put him in an ambulance, he said.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In his nightly televised address, video of which was posted shortly after the accident, Zelenskiy said he had just returned from the area around Kharkiv, adding that “almost the entire region is de-occupied” after a lightning counteroffensive to dislodge Russian troops. “It was an unprecedented movement of our soldiers – the Ukrainians once again managed to do what many thought was impossible,” he said. After visiting the liberated city of Izium, Zelenskiy said Ukraine’s troops had recaptured around 8,000 sq km (3,100 square miles) of territory. • Ukraine’s defence ministry found what its officials believe to be a “torture chamber” used by Russian troops to hold Ukrainian prisoners in the city of Balakliia. While some Balakliia residents told the Guardian that they had little interaction with the Russian forces, who mostly stayed on edges of the town, and did not experience the scenes of torture and execution seen elsewhere in the country, Serhiy Bolvinov, head of the Kharkiv region national police investigation department, said that 40 people had been detained during the occupation. One resident told the BBC that he was held by Russians in the city’s police station for more than 40 days and was tortured with electrocution. • Germany has delivered four more Gepard anti-aircraft guns and 65 refrigerators to Ukraine, the German government announced on Wednesday. The four additional units bring the total number of Gepard units provided by Germany to Ukraine to 24. • Kremlin sources “are now working to clear [Russia’s President Vladimir] Putin of any responsibly of the defeat, instead blaming the loss of almost all of occupied Kharkiv oblast on under-informed military advisers”, according to the Institute of the Study of War. In a statement reported by CNBC, the institute said that “Kremlin officials and state media propagandists are extensively discussing the reasons for the Russian defeat in Kharkiv oblast, a marked change from their previous pattern of reporting on exaggerated or fabricated Russian successes with limited detail”. • The prospects for peace in Ukraine are currently “minimal”, the UN secretary general said on Wednesday after a phone conversation with Vladimir Putin. “I have the feeling we are still far away from peace. I would be lying if I would say it could happen soon,” Guterres said, adding: “I have no illusion; at the present moment the chances of a peace deal are minimal.” Even a ceasefire was “not in sight”, he said. • Putin still believes he was right to launch an invasion of Ukraine, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, said on Wednesday after a 90-minute telephone call with the Russian president. “Sadly, I cannot tell you that the impression has grown that it was a mistake to begin this war,” Scholz said in a press briefing. • Eight Russian missiles that struck Kryvyi Rih on Wednesday were directed at hydraulic structures, causing enough damage that the water level of the Inhulets river was rising and posing a serious threat to the city. This aligns with Ukraine’s concerns that Russia will continue to target Ukraine’s infrastructure in retribution for its success in regaining occupied territory. Kryvyi Rih is Zelenskiy’s home town. • Russian troops have returned to Kreminna, a city in the Russian-occupied Luhansk region that was “completely empty” yesterday, said Serhiy Hadai, the region’s governor, and tore down the Ukrainian flags that local partisans had raised in celebration. Yesterday, a similar situation happened in Svatove – Russian troops left but returned after some time, Hadai said. Russian troops also left Starobilsk, another city in the Luhansk region.
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HEADLINE	09/14 Former Soviet states eye opportunities
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/14/former-soviet-states-eye-opportunities-as-russia-suffers-ukraine-rout
GIST	The rout of the Russian army in Ukraine’s Kharkiv region seems likely to be a turning point in Kyiv’s battle to kick Russian troops out of the country, but it may also cause much broader fallout for Moscow in the wider region, as other former Soviet countries witness what appears to be the limits of Moscow’s capabilities.

“The power of the Russian flag has declined considerably, and the security system across the former Soviet space does seem to be broken,” said Laurence Broers, associate fellow at Chatham House.

[This week, with attention focused across the Black Sea in Ukraine, fighting on the border](#) between Azerbaijan and Armenia killed about 100 troops after Azerbaijan shelled a number of towns in Armenia, with both sides accusing each other of “provocations”.

Analysts said Azerbaijan had decided to test the waters while Russia was struggling in Ukraine. Russia has traditionally supported Armenia in its territorial dispute with Azerbaijan over the three decades since the fall of communism.

“Azerbaijan feels quite confident in this geopolitical moment, and particularly right now during the Ukrainian counteroffensive,” said Tom de Waal, senior fellow at Carnegie Europe. “This seems absolutely aimed at Russia as much as it is at Armenia, testing Russia’s commitment to defend Armenia.”

Russia said it had brokered a ceasefire on Tuesday. Both parties agreed to the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping force as part of a truce to end the full-fledged war in 2020.

Armenia has appealed for military backup from the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a Russia-dominated mutual defence pact, but Moscow is reluctant to intervene directly.

“Russia is clearly equivocating, both because it’s massively overstretched in Ukraine and because it doesn’t want to pick a fight with Azerbaijan at this point,” said de Waal.

Separately, clashes broke out on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on Wednesday morning, killing one border guard and wounding five others in Tajikistan, according to local reports.

While that specific incident is not directly related to the war in Ukraine, and though Russia has traditionally had good relations with both countries, analysts say that the Russian invasion has completely changed the balance of power in a region that for years has been a battleground for Russian, Chinese and western influence, and put Russia on the back foot.

In January this year, when a wave of protests rocked Kazakhstan, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, approved the deployment of a Russian-led CSTO force to the country. The mission was brief and did not engage in any combat, but was enough to shore up the presidency of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

With Kazakhstan’s leader indebted to Moscow for the help, Russian forces keeping the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Kremlin massing troops on the border with Ukraine, Putin seemed to have more influence than ever in the former Soviet space.

Much of that has unravelled during the course of Putin’s bloody “special military operation” in Ukraine, and particularly in the last week as Ukraine’s rapid advance threw Putin’s war plans into disarray.

“We are seeing the collapse of Russia’s reputation as a security patron, which is happening both at the material level with the massive force concentration on Ukraine, but also on the subjective level of the reputation of Russian security guarantees,” said Broers.

Across the region, the invasion of Ukraine has shocked and worried Russian allies, but also emboldened them to take a tougher stance with Moscow.

Kazakhstan, traditionally a close ally, has infuriated many in Moscow by trying to remain neutral over Ukraine, refusing to recognise the Russian-controlled territories in east Ukraine and promising not to aid Russia’s efforts to circumvent international sanctions.

This led some in Moscow to question Kazakhstan’s sovereignty, including the former Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, who called it an “artificial state” in a post he later deleted.

But while Kazakhstan remains wary of the longer-term threats from its bigger neighbour and supposed ally, there are others ready to step in and fill the gap. On Wednesday, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, arrived in Kazakhstan on what is thought to be his first trip abroad since the start of the Covid pandemic.

“We will continue to resolutely support Kazakhstan in protecting its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he said, in a statement that seemed partially designed as a rebuke to the Kremlin.

On Thursday and Friday, Xi and Putin will attend a summit of heads of state from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a loose regional security grouping, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

The leaders of India and Iran are also expected to attend, and the summit will be a chance for Putin to demonstrate that there are still major world powers sympathetic to Russia.

But it is also a chance for countries in the region to highlight that while Russia remains a strong regional player, the power dynamic has shifted.

On Wednesday, Russia designated one of Tajikistan’s opposition parties a terrorist movement, a move which Moscow has long resisted, and which will help the country’s dictatorial government to have any citizen it wants extradited from Russia.

“Many central Asian countries see that Russia needs them more than ever before, and they’re now trying to squeeze as much as they can,” said Temur Umarov, fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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HEADLINE	09/15 Russia missile strikes hit Ukraine dam
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/15/ukraine-city-of-kryvyi-rih-floods-after-russian-missile-strikes-hit-dam
GIST	<p>Volodymyr Zelenskiy has voiced concerns for his home city of Kryvyi Rih after Russian missiles targeted a nearby dam, flooding its streets.</p> <p>In a fresh video address released early on Thursday, the Ukrainian president said “everything is being done to eliminate the consequences of yet another vile Russian act”, referring to the targeting of a dam in Kryvyi Rih, on the Inhulets River 150km (93 miles) south-west of Dnipro, Ukraine.</p> <p>City authorities are fighting to contain the damage to its water system after eight cruise missiles hit a water pumping station there in what Zelenskiy has called an attempt to flood the city, the largest in central Ukraine with an estimated pre-war population of 650,000.</p> <p>Ukrainian legislator Inna Sovsun tweeted: “The water pumping station was destroyed. The river broke through the dam and overflowed its banks. Residential buildings are just a few meters away from the river.”</p> <p>The strikes had caused “extensive flooding” in areas of the city, after the river rose an estimated 2.5 metres, the Institute for the Study of War said. The Russian attack was probably intended to damage Ukrainian pontoon bridges further downstream as part of efforts to disrupt the Kherson counteroffensive, it said.</p> <p>Video posted online showed elevated water levels on the Inhulets and flooded city streets, amid calls for the evacuations of residents.</p> <p>Switching to speak in Russian, Zelenskiy said: “Your missile attacks today, Russian missiles targeting Kryvyi Rih, the dam of the Karachunivske reservoir, the objects that have no military value at all, in fact hitting hundreds of thousands of ordinary civilians, is another reason why Russia will lose ... you</p>

are weaklings waging a war against civilians; scoundrels who, having fled the battlefield, are trying to do harm from somewhere far away.”

Zelenskiy’s address was released following news the car the president was in was involved in a traffic accident in Kyiv. He was not seriously hurt, spokesperson Serhii Nykyforov said.

Nykyforov did not say when the accident occurred, but said the car Zelenskiy was in collided with a private vehicle in the Ukrainian capital on Wednesday night.

“The president was examined by a doctor, no serious injuries were found,” he said in a Facebook post, adding the accident would be investigated. He did not specify what injuries Zelenskiy might have suffered, if any.

Medics accompanying Zelenskiy gave the driver of the private car emergency aid and put him in an ambulance, Nykyforov said.

Zelenskiy was returning to Kyiv on Wednesday from the Kharkiv region, where he visited troops in the recaptured city of Izium.

In his video address, Zelenskiy also spoke of the destruction found by Ukrainian forces in the Kharkiv region, saying evidence of torture and other abuses strengthened allegations of genocide of Ukrainians, in the wake of similar abuses in Bucha, and the Chernihiv and Sumy regions.

He said almost the entire region of Kharkiv had now been liberated by “an unprecedented movement of our warriors”.

“Ukrainians once again managed to do what many considered impossible,” he said, adding that nearly 400 settlements had been retaken. “The 150,000 Ukrainians who remained in this territory feel again now what an ordinary, safe, normal life is like.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 Child poverty rates in US fall
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/sep/14/us-child-poverty-rate-tax-credit-census
GIST	<p>The US child poverty rate fell by nearly half in 2021, largely thanks to enhanced child tax credits, new census data shows.</p> <p>The child poverty rate fell to a low of 5.2% compared with 9.7% the year before.</p> <p>Experts noted that increased child tax credits provided low-income families with much-needed resources during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> <p>“This is what policy success looks like,” Chuck Marr, vice-president of federal tax policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, told Insider. “This was a historic achievement to reduce child poverty by a record amount driven by the expansion of the child tax credit.”</p> <p>The new data comes from the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) statistic, a US Census Bureau measure that takes into account non-cash benefits, tax credits and cash assistance, all of which were made more available during 2021 than in previous years.</p> <p>Those additional benefits are not measured in the Official Poverty Measure (OPM), which experts say is a major flaw in the system, CNN reported.</p> <p>The current OPM for children is at 15.3%, creating one of the largest divergences from the SPM since 2009, when the SPM was created.</p>

	<p>Overall, US child poverty levels have been falling for decades. Child poverty has fallen by 59% since 1993 with rates declining in all 50 states, the New York Times reported.</p> <p>But there is concern that the drop in poverty seen last year will prove temporary, because tax credit enhancements were only available in 2021.</p> <p>In March 2021, as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, child tax credits were enhanced for one year. Payments increased to \$3,600 for children under six years old and \$3,000 for each child between six and 17.</p> <p>An extension of child tax credits failed to pass Congress, amid opposition from Republicans and the West Virginia Democratic senator Joe Manchin.</p> <p>Child allowances were not included in the Democrat-led health, tax and climate bill that passed last month. “We know how to fight poverty, and it’s not super complicated,” Elizabeth Lower-Basch, director of income and work supports at the Center for Law and Social Policy (Clasp), told CNN.</p> <p>“It’s about giving people the resources they need to meet their and their families’ needs.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Sweden PM resigns; election defeat
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/14/swedish-pm-concedes-election-defeat-to-bloc-led-by-far-right-sweden-democrats
GIST	<p>The leader of Sweden’s incumbent Social Democrats has resigned as prime minister after conceding defeat in the country’s knife-edge election, handing victory to a loose bloc of rightwing parties that includes the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD).</p> <p>The PM, Magdalena Andersson, called a press conference at which she accepted defeat, while pointing out that her Social Democrats remained Sweden’s largest party with more than 30% of the vote – and that the majority in parliament for the right bloc was very slim.</p> <p>When postal votes and those of citizens living abroad were counted on Wednesday, a loose coalition of the SD and the three centre-right parties edged ahead to win a majority of three in the parliament of 349 seats.</p> <p>There is no formal agreement between the SD and the Moderates, Christian Democrats and Liberals about how they will govern together, although the centre-right parties have said they will not countenance ministerial positions for the far right.</p> <p>However, the SD’s strong showing, making it Sweden’s second-largest party – and the largest on the right with more than 20% of the poll – puts it in a strong position to extract concessions in return for its support in parliament.</p> <p>Andersson, the Social Democrats party leader, noted that it was a “narrow majority, but a majority nonetheless”.</p> <p>“So tomorrow I will hand in my resignation as prime minister, and the responsibility for the continued process will go to the speaker,” Andersson said.</p> <p>“Now the work begins to make Sweden good again,” the SD leader, Jimmie Åkesson, wrote on Facebook.</p> <p>“We have had enough of failed social democratic policies that for eight years have continued to lead the country in the wrong direction. It is time to start rebuilding security, welfare and cohesion. It is time to put Sweden first,” he wrote.</p>

Ulf Kristersson, whose Moderate party came third with 19% of the poll and who is now in line to become the new prime minister, thanked voters for their trust and said: “Now we will have order in Sweden.”

The final tally showed that the right bloc won 49.6% of votes, while the left bloc secured 48.9%.

Given the closeness of the vote and the uncertainty over the final outcome, all the parties had refrained from making statements about a possible new government since polling stations closed on Sunday night. However, some of the key battlegrounds for a future rightwing coalition government with SD influence have already become clear.

Swedish television’s flagship news magazine on Tuesday night aired a short interview with the head of the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism, who expressed concern that the result might encourage racists and repeated earlier accusations that the SD are ambiguous over whether Jews can be Swedes. Björn Söder, formerly party secretary for the SD and a central figure in the party’s leadership, subsequently accused the broadcaster of bias and propaganda and demanded that public service broadcasting should be “fundamentally reformed”. A former Moderate party MP compared public service to “a cancerous tumour” in a tweet.

The narrow majority enjoyed by the right, however, promises to make any future government fragile and vulnerable to individual parliamentarians voting with their conscience. One Liberal party MP already on Wednesday promised to try to bring down a government with SD involvement if the final result confirmed her election to parliament.

“I went to the polls to defend human rights and freedoms,” Romina Pourmokhtari told Swedish media. “That is where we Liberals will have to aim our fire in the coming years.”

After emerging from among Sweden’s violent neo-Nazi groups in the late 1980s, the Sweden Democrats have made strenuous and repeated efforts to exclude racists and extremists from their ranks and present themselves as a socially conservative party aiming to defend Swedish national traditions and culture. But a halt to immigration from non-European countries is a central plank of the party’s politics and key to its electoral success. The SD’s stated policy of “open Swedishness” holds that anybody can become Swedish if they learn the language and adopt the culture, but the notion of a Swedish Muslim appears to lie outside this approach, researchers say.

Sweden has become one of Europe’s most ethnically mixed nations since large-scale asylum-based immigration first began in the 1990s and accelerated sharply following the collapse of the Arab spring. For many years, the SD stood alone as the only party opposing immigration, which the party links to the recent rise of gun and gang criminality among second-generation immigrant youth in Swedish cities.

“This is a historic moment, an era has come to an end,” said Jonas Hinnfors, a politics professor at Gothenburg University. “We don’t yet know the magnitude of the change to come, but for the past 50 or 60 years there has been a steady development towards broadly social liberal values, individual freedoms and minority rights, to which both left and right have contributed.

“Whatever happens now, depending on the extent that the SD will be able to exert influence, that development has probably come to an end and we will see a rolling back of some of the things we have taken for granted.”

There was likely to be a new approach to the media, more money for law and order, and a period where Swedishness and loyalty to Swedish values defined from above would be of central importance and would permeate school and university courses, libraries, culture, and the civil service, Hinnfors said. “The direction is clear.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 Long-term care facility fire displaces 77
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/fire-in-grays-harbor-county-displaces-nearly-80-people

GIST	<p>MONTESANO, Wash. — On Wednesday night fire crews responded to a fire at Montesano Health and Rehab, a long-term care facility, forcing roughly 77 patients to evacuate.</p> <p>The fire has been fully extinguished and there have been zero reported injuries.</p> <p>According to Washington Emergency Management, state fire mobilization was approved for the long-term care facility in Grays Harbor County.</p> <p>According to Grays Harbor Sheriff, Rick Scott, residents of the Montesano all residents have been moved to other facilities.</p> <p>Red Cross NW disaster action teams are providing assistance and emergency support as needed.</p> <p>The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 For one Russian border city, war too real
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/world/europe/russia-ukraine-border-belgorod.html
GIST	<p>BELGOROD, Russia — Military trucks and armored personnel carriers spray-painted with the letter Z rumble through intersections, and groups of men in camouflage walk the streets and shop for military goods like thermal underwear. Refugees pour in from territories in Ukraine that were recently lost to the enemy.</p> <p>The sounds of nearby explosions have become regular occurrences in Belgorod, 25 miles from the Ukrainian border, and anxious store owners call the police reporting imagined bomb threats, a sign of the paranoia that is starting to spread. Residents express fear about what will come next, with some even speculating that Ukrainian troops could take a step they have avoided for nearly seven months and enter Russian territory.</p> <p>“It is as if they are already here,” an ashen-faced woman told a merchant at the city’s central market, after the boom of an explosion.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin has tried to keep life as normal as possible for most Russians as he conducts his war in Ukraine, and to make the hostilities a distant concept. But with Ukrainian forces now on the offensive, residents of Belgorod feel as if the war has come to their doorstep.</p> <p>“There are so many rumors, people are afraid,” said Maksim, 21, a merchant at the market.</p> <p>He was selling thermal underwear, camouflage jackets and other sporting goods that once went to hunters and fishermen but are now being bought up by soldiers and their relatives. Like most other residents interviewed for this article, he declined to provide his full name out of fear of retribution.</p> <p>The mood at the market, a warren of stalls selling clothes, home goods and military gear, was tense. Though the city of Belgorod is not being directly attacked, Russia’s military air defense is intercepting missiles in the distance. The sounds of the explosions ring out, and in the Komsomolsky neighborhood, homes and property are being hit by debris.</p> <p>On Monday, a teachers’ college, a shopping center and a bus station were conducting evacuation drills as officials assured worried local civilians that the drills were planned in advance. The regional administration is evacuating towns and villages along the border as they come under Ukrainian shelling. Denis, a local businessman, recently paid someone to dig an 11-foot bomb shelter in his yard.</p> <p>Many residents of the city fear the risks to their safety are growing.</p>

“We feel scared, and it is especially hard when you work with children,” said Ekaterina, 21, a kindergarten teacher who said a shell fragment fell onto the school early this week. “The children start running around screaming ‘missiles’ but we tell them it is just thunder.”

While most residents of Belgorod support the government in Moscow and the war effort, some express frustration that the rest of Russia is still living as if it isn’t waging a full-scale war.

“How are they not ashamed!” shouted a middle-aged woman named Lyudmila, from the Komsomosky neighborhood.

“In Moscow, they are celebrating City Day, while here blood is being spilled,” she said, referring to a [citywide celebration last week honoring](#) the founding of the Russian capital, which featured fireworks and the grand opening of a large Ferris wheel by Mr. Putin. “Here everyone is worried about our soldiers, while there everyone is partying and drinking!”

Even those who support the war effort privately expressed frustration that the Kremlin insists on calling it a “special military operation,” when they can see that it is a full-blown war. Many wonder if there will be a draft, and if so, how soon.

Refugees arriving from Ukraine are also driving home the reality of the war.

Thousands of people from eastern Ukraine have arrived in recent months, especially last week as Ukrainian troops retook territory in the northeast that had been held by Russian soldiers. Some were worried about living under the control of the Ukrainian government in Kyiv, while others, especially those who had acquired Russian passports or taken jobs in the occupying administration, feared being treated as collaborators, according to activists who are helping them leave.

“They were trying to live their lives, working in hospitals, in schools, stores, but that side understands this as collaborating with occupiers,” said Yulia Nemchinova, who has been helping refugees in Belgorod. Ms. Nemchinova, who holds pro-Russian views, left her native Kharkiv, just across the border, in 2014 after her husband had legal trouble with the Ukrainian authorities.

But she also said that many people felt shocked and effectively betrayed by a Russian army they saw as liberators, but that was now on the run in the face of a sweeping Ukrainian offensive.

“They were promised: Russia is here forever,” Ms. Nemchinova said.

While journalists and investigators are uncovering evidence of atrocities and human rights abuses committed by Russians during occupation, the people who recently fled to Belgorod say the retreating Russian army told them to leave because of potential retaliation.

In interviews in Belgorod, people who fled from territory recently retaken by Ukraine said they feared that when the Ukrainian army entered the local administration building, soldiers would find the lists of people who had accepted jobs or humanitarian assistance from the Russian interim administration and mete out punishments for collaborating. People were also scared because Ukraine passed a law punishing collaboration with the occupying authorities with 10 to 15 years in prison.

A woman named Irina said her boyfriend, a former Ukrainian border guard, had his personal information posted in a Telegram group purporting to name collaborators.

“There’s no going back there,” Irina, 18, said in an interview at a clothing bank where newly arrived refugees were collecting clothes and food. Her mother and sister remained in their village, and she said she hoped the Russians reoccupied it soon.

In Belgorod, a city of 400,000, fears about Ukrainians on the other side of the border would have been unheard-of a decade ago. For years, Russians in Belgorod regularly traveled the 50 miles to Kharkiv —

Ukraine's second biggest city, with a prewar population of 2 million — to party, dine and shop. Many families are split across the border.

"Belgorod was in total shock," said Oleg Ksenov, 41, a restaurant owner who has spent the past months evacuating people from battlefields in Ukraine and bringing them to Russia. "We just love Kharkiv."

Viktoriia, 50, who owns a cafe and bakery in the city, said that Kharkiv was a "megapolis" in the minds of every Belgorod resident.

"We had a joke: If you want to meet people from Belgorod, go to Stargorod restaurant in Kharkiv on the weekend," she said.

The relationship worked both ways. In the years after Russia instigated a separatist war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, Ukraine imposed stricter laws about speaking Ukrainian, and not Russian, in public. That prompted Russian speakers from Kharkiv to travel to Belgorod to watch movies in Russian, said Denis, the businessman, who is 44.

Now the two cities are effectively separated by a front line.

"It is a tragedy of tectonic proportions," he said. "It touches every person from Belgorod. Every family is connected with Ukraine."

His aunt Larisa had just arrived over the weekend from Liman, a city in the Donetsk region that was occupied by the Russian army at the end of May. Since then, it has had no electricity, gas or running water, and she said more than 80 percent of the housing stock was destroyed.

Earlier in May, a missile — she didn't know from which army, though she blamed Ukraine — hit her apartment building. Then, at the end of the month, the Russians arrived.

"I was waiting for them with so much happiness," Larisa, 74, said in surzhik, a dialect that is a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian.

Now her home is the scene of heavy frontline fighting. She said she has trouble walking, and struggled to get to the basement every time the air raid siren sounded.

As the fighting grew closer, she said, she knew she had to get out, because she didn't want to be governed anymore by Kyiv and was scared.

Mr. Ksenov, who was born in Kharkiv but made Belgorod his home more than a decade ago, has dedicated his time to helping civilians flee from Ukraine to Russia. He worries about what will happen to the people from border regions of both countries in the long term.

"This slaughter will eventually end," he said of the war, in an interview in his restaurant, which has plywood covering the windows in case of a bombing.

"But who will we be? How will we look one another in the eyes?"

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HEADLINE	09/14 Zelensky visits a city 9 miles from front
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/world/europe/ukraine-zelensky-izium.html
GIST	IZIUM, Ukraine — Standing in a cold drizzle among wreckage left behind by Russia's chaotic retreat, President Volodymyr Zelensky looked to the sky on Wednesday toward Ukraine's flag flying over the main square of a city reclaimed just days ago in a stunning counterattack.

“Today, when we look up, we are looking for only one thing — the flag of Ukraine,” Mr. Zelensky told soldiers in front of the city’s bombed-out municipal building. “Our blue and yellow flag is already flying in de-occupied Izium. And it will be so in every Ukrainian city and village.”

The president’s unannounced appearance in Izium, about nine miles from the front in Ukraine’s northeast, was a tangible sign of Ukraine’s soaring morale and its growing boldness — a demonstration that the military could ensure Mr. Zelensky’s safety even near the front and that it would staunchly defend what it had reclaimed.

Russian soldiers fled the city in a humiliating retreat last week, abandoning tanks, trucks and boxes of ammunition in the streets, and Mr. Zelensky’s visit underscored that humiliation.

After addressing the soldiers, Mr. Zelensky stood for a moment of silence to commemorate those killed in the fighting. He then posed for photographs with soldiers and left, lest the Russian military launch a missile at the square while he and government ministers were in easy range, aides said.

After months [telegraphing an intention](#) to counterattack in the south, the Ukrainian Army this month [staged a lightning offensive](#) in the northeastern Kharkiv region, capturing thousands of square miles of territory, dozens of towns and villages and important centers like Izium, a railway hub for eastern Ukraine.

After the defeat of Russian troops in the battle for Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, early in the war, the Kharkiv counteroffensive has been Ukraine’s most successful military operation. Ukrainian officials are now seeking to capitalize on two key gains: [demoralization in the Russian Army](#) and the greater willingness of Western governments to assist Ukraine with weapons supplies.

The shipments of weapons from the European Union have slowed, but its leaders have stood by Ukraine despite the pains of [a growing energy crisis](#) caused by the war. The top E.U. executive official, Ursula von der Leyen, proposed measures to ease the spiraling prices, and said in [a speech](#) on Wednesday that sanctions on Russia would remain in place.

“This is a war on our energy, a war on our economy, a war on our values and a war on our future,” she told E.U. lawmakers in Strasbourg, France.

Ukrainian forces were pressing the advantage on Wednesday, fighting on the outskirts of Lyman, according to Ukrainian officials. The city, near the Russian-occupied province of Luhansk, could serve as a launching point for advances east.

But military analysts say the Ukrainians’ rapid advance comes with [a risk of stretching lines too thin](#), which could expose reclaimed towns to Russian attacks. Despite its problems with manpower and organization, Russia still has a significant advantage over Ukraine in supplies and ammunition. And as Russian forces establish new defensive positions, front lines could freeze into a bloody stalemate that saps Ukraine’s strength through the winter.

Russia has also shown a willingness to strike civilian targets far from the front. Hours after Mr. Zelensky’s visit, a salvo of cruise missiles [slammed into the central Ukrainian city](#) of Kryvyi Rih, the president’s hometown, where, residents said, a dam was damaged.

In Izium, where soldiers patrolled eerily deserted streets and explosions rang out every hour or so as Ukrainian soldiers cleared land mines, the city seemed only in the early stages of returning to normal.

Russian graffiti still sprawled on a sign leading into town proclaimed “New Moscow” beside an abandoned Russian tank and green boxes of ammunition. Of the town’s prewar population, about 40,000, about a quarter remained during the occupation.

Officials on the high-level visit with the president wasted no opportunity to thumb their noses at the Russian Army's pell-mell departure.

"The Russian were defeated here, and they fled in a shameful way," Hanna Maylar, a deputy minister of defense, said in an interview. But, she added, intense fighting continues in other areas. "Most of Kharkiv region is liberated, but the Russians still have a plan to conquer Ukraine."

The Kharkiv offensive, and in particular the move into Izium, was a significant setback for Russia's war effort. By threatening a flank of Russian forces in the eastern Donbas region, the offensive has all but ruled out a secure Russian takeover of the Donbas, military analysts say.

The region became central to Russia's military objectives after the failed attack on Kyiv, and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia cited it among his justifications for the invasion in February. He asserted that Russian troops had been deployed to protect Russian speakers in the Donbas against the Ukrainian government, which the Kremlin has [falsely claimed](#) is full of "Nazis."

But Anton Gerashchenko, a Ukrainian deputy minister of interior, said the collapse in Russian morale was perhaps a greater achievement of the counterattack than regained territory.

"Russia already lost," he said. "They destroyed the myth themselves. For 20 years, they built up stories that 'our army is the strongest.' And then it turns out not to be so."

"The commander in chief Zelya is right there," wrote one, Aleksandr Zhuchkovsky. "Posing in Izium with the valiant 'defenders.'" He added that the Russian saying "Where once the Russian flag is raised it should not be lowered" should be retired "to avoid being ashamed."

He called, vaguely, for an overhaul of the Russian leadership. "This pain should be treated not with vodka, but with urgent decisions, cardinal reforms of the system."

But despite [growing calls](#) from Russian nationalists for a full-scale draft, a spokesman for the Kremlin, Dmitri S. Peskov, [said on Tuesday](#) that mobilization was "not being discussed at the moment."

For residents in Izium, where damp fall leaves littered the asphalt, the Russians' swift departure was as much a surprise for them as the Russians who had occupied the city for nearly seven months. Over all, as Russia has fallen back from the northeast, Ukrainian forces have taken back an area that is home to about 150,000 people in 300 cities, towns and villages.

Yevhen Yenin, a deputy minister of internal affairs in Ukraine, said the police had found 10 bodies in and around the nearby town of Balakliya, indicating the Russian Army had committed human rights abuses. So far, soldiers have stumbled on no scene as macabre as the streets of Bucha, a Kyiv suburb where the bodies of about 450 civilians were left behind by retreating Russian troops.

"The work is just beginning" in the northeast, Mr. Yenin said, adding that it was "too early to tell" the extent of abuses. The regional police in Kharkiv said in a statement on Wednesday that they had confirmed the death by torture of one person in a police station used by Russian forces to detain civilians in Balakliya. A former detainee told reporters on Tuesday he had been subjected to electrical shocks.

The Russian government has dismissed witness accounts, [photographs](#), [videos](#) and [other evidence of atrocities](#) by its soldiers in Bucha, and has denied accusations against its forces.

Residents of newly reclaimed communities have said that the Ukrainian authorities were interrogating some people and searching for collaborators, and that civilians had died in the Ukrainian counterattack on their communities. But the mood was generally of deep gratitude.

	<p>“I stood on the bridge and watched our boys come in, and I wanted to hug them all,” said Oleksandr Sabodishin, a retiree, who was riding his bicycle on errands on Wednesday.</p> <p>“From morning to night, I baked pies and brought them to our soldiers,” said another retiree, Lyubov Shamrai. “I made cherry dumplings, strawberry dumplings. I wanted to give them something homemade.”</p> <p>In the ceremony at Izium’s square, Mr. Zelensky watched the flag raised over ruins — all four buildings ringing the plaza were burned, partly collapsed or lacking roofs. It was unclear whether they had been damaged in the Russian assault on the city in March or the Ukrainian counterattack this month.</p> <p>“There are no surprises,” Mr. Zelensky said of the destruction. “This is shocking, but not a shock for me. We saw this in Bucha, the same destroyed buildings, killed people. It’s part of our history now and a part of the modern Russian nation. They did it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Florida flies migrants to Martha’s Vineyard
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/us/desantis-florida-migrants-marthas-vineyard.html
GIST	<p>About 50 migrants unexpectedly arrived by plane on Martha’s Vineyard on Wednesday, local officials said, escalating a tactic in which Republican-led states have shipped busloads of migrants to liberal bastions like Washington and New York to protest the significant rise in illegal immigration under President Biden.</p> <p>The migrant group, which included children, arrived on two planes around 3 p.m. without any warning, said State Senator Julian Cyr, a Massachusetts Democrat representing Cape Cod, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. Officials and volunteers from the island’s six towns “really moved heaven and earth to essentially set up the response that we would do in the event of a hurricane,” he said.</p> <p>As the migrants received Covid-19 tests, food and clothing, there was confusion on the ground about who had sent them to Martha’s Vineyard, a popular getaway for the moneyed and powerful. Migrants said they had started the day in San Antonio, but it was the Florida governor’s office that took responsibility.</p> <p>Taryn M. Fenske, the communications director for Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, said the two flights were part of a state program to transport undocumented immigrants to so-called sanctuary destinations. This year the Florida Legislature set aside \$12 million for the transportation program.</p> <p>“States like Massachusetts, New York and California will better facilitate the care of these individuals who they have invited into our country by incentivizing illegal immigration through their designation as ‘sanctuary states’ and support for the Biden administration’s open border policies,” Ms. Fenske said in a statement.</p> <p>One of the migrants, who asked to be identified only as Leonel, said in Spanish that the people of Martha’s Vineyard were generous and that he “had never seen anything like it.” They gave him a pair of shoes.</p> <p>“I haven’t slept well in three months,” said Leonel, who does not have any relatives or friends in the United States. “It’s been three months since I put on a new pair of pants. Or shoes.”</p> <p>Leonel, 45, said he had left Venezuela about three months ago, crossing the roadless Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama and making his way north through Central America and Mexico. His first attempt at crossing the U.S. border failed. During his second attempt, at Piedras Negras, Mexico, he made it across the Rio Grande.</p> <p>Leonel spent several days in immigration detention before being released in San Antonio, where he and other migrants were eventually told they could get passage to Massachusetts. They agreed.</p>

Terry MacCormack, the press secretary for Gov. Charlie Baker of Massachusetts, said in a statement that his administration was in communication with local island officials, who were providing “short-term shelter services” to the migrants.

The migrants appear to mostly be from Venezuela, State Representative Dylan Fernandes said. They received basic relief services at Martha’s Vineyard Community Services in Oak Bluffs before being taken across the street to the regional high school and eventually to St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Edgartown, a former whaling town that is the most manicured on the island.

Even large American cities have struggled to cope with migrants who arrive “with little to no notice,” as Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois put it in a disaster proclamation on Wednesday. He cited the emergency shelter and medical care needed by the 500 migrants who have been shipped on buses from Texas to Chicago.

“While other states may be treating these vulnerable families as pawns, here in Illinois, we are treating them as people,” Mr. Pritzker said in a statement.

The challenge faced by Martha’s Vineyard — which has a year-round population of about 20,000 — may be even more stark.

The Rev. Chip Seadale said St. Andrew’s had decided to take in the migrants for the night after learning that they had nowhere to go. A parishioner had reached out to him, knowing that the church helps house homeless people in the winter.

The island’s sole homeless shelter does not operate during the summer and has room for 10 people, with one bathroom, said Barbara Rush, the warden at St. Andrew’s. “Fifty people with no homes is an overwhelming number for the size of the community,” she said. “But this is a strong and capable community.”

While Martha’s Vineyard is known as the summer destination for the rich and powerful — President Barack Obama and John Kerry have homes there — the island faces a shortage of affordable housing, with the median home price at about \$1 million. The migrants are also arriving just at the end of the summer season, when seasonal work has ended.

“There are literally no jobs in the winter, and there is no affordable housing on Martha’s Vineyard,” Ms. Rush said. “The bulk of people that work a lower- to middle-income job live off island and commute.”

She said local community groups, churches and restaurants were all pitching in. Among the volunteers was Sergio Racig, a property manager who went to the church to help translate. “Some of them were tortured by the Mexican cartel — some very, very bad things happened to them,” he said, adding, “They are happy to see all the support from the island.”

Mr. DeSantis, a Republican with presidential ambitions, has repeatedly bashed the federal government for transporting migrants to Florida and has threatened to send them to liberal enclaves instead. He has frequently mentioned Mr. Biden’s home state of Delaware as a possible destination.

Mr. DeSantis’s lieutenant governor, Jeanette M. Núñez, a Cuban American, faced political heat last month from Democrats in Miami, her hometown, when she said in a Spanish-language radio interview that Cuban migrants illegally crossing the border from Mexico should be bused out of state.

The Florida governor told reporters last month that the state had not yet relocated migrants because a similar program in Texas had “taken a lot of pressure off us.” Texas has sent at least 6,200 migrants to the nation’s capital this year, but the governor’s office there said on Wednesday that it had not been involved in the transportation to Martha’s Vineyard.

	Mr. Cyr, the Massachusetts state senator, criticized the motive behind the flights. “This is a cruel ruse that manipulates families that are seeking a better life,” he said, adding, “Our community has been targeted, clearly.”
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HEADLINE	09/14 NYC mayor: shelters at breaking point
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/nyregion/homeless-shelters-nyc-adams.html
GIST	<p>Facing a population explosion in New York City’s shelter system driven largely by a monthslong flood of migrant asylum seekers, Mayor Eric Adams on Wednesday seemed to call into question the city’s unique “right to shelter,” which has been guaranteed by court order for over 35 years.</p> <p>New York is the only place in the country where every person who seeks a bed must be given one. And Mr. Adams, citing a “new and unforeseen reality” that “no city official, advocate or court ever could have contemplated” in which 11,000 migrants have entered the shelter system since May, said that the system was “nearing its breaking point.”</p> <p>As a result, he said, “the city’s prior practices, which never contemplated the busing of thousands of people into New York City, must be reassessed.” The Republican governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, has been sending buses of migrants, mostly from South and Central America, up from the border to New York as part of a campaign to push Democrats to tighten immigration.</p> <p>Pressed on whether Mr. Adams was specifically suggesting an end of the right to shelter, his press secretary, Fabien Levy, at first echoed the mayor, saying: “No city official, advocate, or court ever could have contemplated the unprecedented crisis. We’re saying the whole system needs to be reassessed.”</p> <p>Later in the day, Mr. Levy added, “Every New Yorker has a right to shelter. We are not disputing that.”</p> <p>Still later, he said: “We’re not trying to get rid of right to shelter. Right to shelter is law.”</p> <p>The administration’s statements came the day after the city failed to offer beds to 60 of the hundreds of men who arrived on Monday at the men’s intake shelter on East 30th Street in Manhattan, the first lapse of that magnitude in over a decade.</p> <p>The math of migration has been relentless and unforgiving. Since June, the population of the city’s main shelter system, which was already having problems moving people into permanent housing, has grown by 20 percent.</p> <p>Just since Aug. 9, the population of the main shelter system has grown by more than 5,000, from 51,000 to nearly 56,000, an increase of nearly 10 percent. In the past week, the shelter population has jumped by over 1,000.</p> <p>If the city were to consider undoing the right to shelter, its path would not be simple. Its lawyers would need to go to court in two different cases from the 1980s — one that established the right for single adults, and another that enshrined it for families — and ask to be relieved of its obligation to provide shelter to these populations.</p> <p>Any such attempt would be fought by the Legal Aid Society, which filed the litigation that led to the right to shelter.</p> <p>“While we understand and appreciate the demands that the city faces, the law is clear,” the society said in a statement Wednesday. “Anyone in need of shelter, including asylum seekers, is entitled to such in New York City. This principle has been settled for decades, and is not subject to unilateral tinkering by a new administration.”</p> <p>Condemnation of the mayor’s remarks from left-leaning elected officials was swift.</p>

“Hard, unequivocal NO,” Councilman Lincoln Restler of Brooklyn [wrote on Twitter](#). “As Gandhi famously said: ‘The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.’ New Yorkers are proud to guarantee a right to shelter for all who need a safe place to sleep. That will not change.”

Ritchie Torres, a congressman and former city councilman from the Bronx, warned that an end to the right to shelter would force people into the streets.

“But for the right to shelter, NYC would have the same level of street homelessness as California, where homeless encampments are ubiquitous,” he [wrote on Twitter](#).

The last mayor to try to tamper with the right to shelter was Michael R. Bloomberg. In 2008, after a battle that dragged on for years, [his administration gave in](#).

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HEADLINE	09/14 ERs across Canada close amid crisis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/world/canada/nurse-shortage-emergency-rooms.html
GIST	<p>One night in March, an understaffed hospital in Red Lake, a tiny town in northwestern Ontario, took the drastic step of shutting down its emergency department. Road signs bearing the ‘H’ symbol to guide drivers along the 60-mile route toward the hospital were covered up. The next hospital was more than two hours away.</p> <p>Sue LeBeau, the chief executive of Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital, took a picture of the covered hospital road sign. “This is something that moved me to tears when I saw it,” she said.</p> <p>It was the first unplanned emergency room closure in Ontario since 2006, and it signaled a growing crisis, not just in one province, but across Canada. Since then, dozens of emergency rooms across the country have been forced to close, usually for a night, but sometimes for a weekend, because they don’t have enough workers.</p> <p>A shortage of nurses — who have been driven away from the profession by unsafe working conditions, wage dissatisfaction, and burnout from the pandemic — has pushed Canadian hospitals to the brink.</p> <p>With an underfunded public health system, Canada already has some of the longest health care wait times in the world, but now those have grown even longer, with patients reporting spending multiple days before being admitted to a hospital.</p> <p>Nurses’ unions and other medical organizations are pushing for provincial governments, which administer health care in Canada, to declare the situation a “state of emergency” and direct more funding to address it.</p> <p>“I don’t use those words lightly,” said Dr. Paul Parks, president of the emergency medicine section of the Alberta Medical Association, an advocacy group representing about 14,000 physicians in the western Canadian province.</p> <p>“It is really a disaster mode because the definition of disaster in medicine is that the demand outstrips the ability to supply the care,” he said. “That’s what’s happening every day in our hospitals across the country.”</p> <p>The United States and other countries, including England, are grappling with similar issues. Some U.S. states have tried raising nurses’ wages and Oregon called in 1,500 National Guard to help overwhelmed staff, in desperate attempts to fill the gap.</p>

In Ontario, Canada's most populous province, the shortage of nurses has recently forced 16 emergency departments to close, according to Ontario Health, the agency that oversees health care administration in the province.

The lack of health care workers means it takes longer for doctors to transfer acutely ill patients to hospitals with more resources and those doctors are waiting longer to find a bed, said Christine Moon, a spokeswoman for CitiCall, a 24-hour consultation line for Ontario doctors, in an email.

It's a scene playing out across Canada. In British Columbia, a province where almost one million people do not have a family doctor, there were about a dozen emergency room closures in rural communities in August.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the emergency room at one community hospital in a region of more than 300,000 people closed from July 1 until August 29.

In Saskatchewan, the union representing nurses in the province said the emergency room at Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon was 200 percent over capacity in late August because of the nurse shortage. The situation was much the same when Tasha Jiricka, a 24-year-old with fibromyalgia, a chronic pain condition, arrived there by ambulance earlier that month.

With intense stomach pains and unable to eat or drink, Ms. Jiricka, was assessed by nurses who thought she should be admitted, but for three days there were no open beds in the 407-bed hospital. She sat in the emergency waiting room, in pain, until one became available.

"Honestly, the only thing that got me through were the other people who were waiting," said Ms. Jiricka in a phone interview from her hospital bed.

"We have a work force that is exhausted, demoralized, and looking at the door after toiling through the pandemic, suffering real wage cuts and working in an environment that is often unsafe for them," Michael Hurley, president of the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, said at a news conference in August.

To help address the crisis, the nation's health authorities are trying to attract nurses from abroad and retain current or recently retired staff.

Jean-Yves Duclos, Canada's health minister, announced last month that he was reinstating the position of chief nursing officer, a person who helps shape national policy, and a role that the government scrapped a decade ago.

"We need to support our nurses, make sure they are heard and that their challenges are met with solutions," he said at a news conference alongside Leigh Chapman, a nurse and researcher who was appointed to the position.

Canada spends more on health care than all but four countries. Last year, the federal government provided 42 billion Canadian dollars for health care through a funding arrangement that increases by at least three percent per year to each of the country's 13 provinces and territories.

But provincial leaders say that's lower than the five percent yearly increase in the costs associated with delivering health care and are pressing the federal government to boost annual funding by at least 28 billion Canadian dollars.

Although provincial governments have ultimate control over financing for health care, including the power to raise taxes, their leaders say they can't afford it.

In Ontario, the provincial government capped wage increases for most public sector employees in 2019, citing budget issues. Unions representing health care workers there blame the staffing shortage on the cap and the chronic underfunding of health care.

“Frankly, we need to make working in hospital better paid and safer,” Mr. Hurley, the hospitals’ union president, said, calling for financial incentives to increase the hiring and retention of experienced nurses and the addition of more full-time positions that would include insurance benefits. About 30 percent of Canada’s nursing jobs are part-time, according to data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

In Toronto, severe staffing shortages prompted the University Health Network, a group of five facilities that are home to some of Canada’s foremost health researchers, to issue a critical care bed alert, a warning to other emergency facilities that a hospital would not be able to readily accept transfers of critically-ill patients, said Dr. Kevin Smith, chief executive of the hospital system.

The warning typically lasts a day or so but at the health network’s Toronto General Hospital, the alert was in effect between July 22 and Sept. 2.

“Increasingly, I think many of us realize we are not going to, in the short term, train our way out of this,” said Dr. Smith. “We can’t produce nurses quickly, with the exception, possibly, of some foreign graduates.”

That’s an option that some provinces are turning to. Ontario’s health minister, Sylvia Jones, directed licensing authorities to “make every effort” to register health professionals who were internationally trained “as expeditiously as possible,” according to letters sent last month to those authorities.

Even before the pandemic, emergency departments were among the most dangerous work environments in hospitals.

Health care workers experience workplace violence at four times the rate of other workers, and half of those incidents happen in the emergency room, according to a 2021 statement by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians.

That violence, coupled with the increased level of risk that nurses are shouldering by serving more patients with less help even as the pandemic endures, has accelerated burnout.

“I think we’re just going to keep losing people because at a certain point, you don’t keep working in that environment,” said Dr. Carolyn Snider, the chief of emergency medicine at St. Michael’s Hospital, one of two trauma centers in downtown Toronto. “That is my biggest worry.”

In a 2019 parliamentary committee report on the issue of workplace violence, health care workers said that fewer staff led to more violence because patients and family members become frustrated with the lack of attention.

It’s something Cathryn Hoy, president of the Ontario Nurses’ Association, hears about regularly from the members of her union: punching, spitting, kicking, and two stabbings in the last six months, she said.

“Nursing is the backbone, and the heartbeat of health care,” she said. “Unless health care touches you, you don’t think about it.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 NHC: 6 th named storm forms in the Atlantic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/article/tropical-storm-fiona-hurricane.html
GIST	<p>Tropical Storm Fiona formed late on Wednesday, becoming the sixth named storm of the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season.</p> <p>The storm, which was about 600 miles east of the Leeward Islands as of Wednesday night, had maximum sustained winds near 50 miles an hour, said John Cangialosi, a meteorologist with the National Hurricane Center. A storm is given a name after it reaches wind speeds of at least 39 miles per hour.</p>

Fiona was expected to move near the Leeward Islands on Friday night and then to the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico on Saturday, he said. Tropical storm watches — meaning that tropical storm conditions are possible, generally within 48 hours — were issued for islands including St. Maarten, Antigua, St. Kitts and Nevis.

“Our intensity prediction here is kind of low-confidence,” Mr. Cangialosi said. “So if you’re anywhere in the Caribbean belt, keep an eye on Fiona, and at least get ready for a strong tropical storm to come through.”

The Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from June through November, [had a relatively quiet start](#), with only three named storms before September. There were no named storms in the Atlantic during August, the first time that had happened since 1997. But storm activity picked up in early September, with [Danielle](#) and [Earl](#), which both eventually became hurricanes, forming within a day of each other.

In early August, scientists at NOAA [issued an updated forecast](#) for the rest of the season, which still called for an above-normal level of activity. In it, they predicted the season — which runs through Nov. 30 — could see 14 to 20 named storms, with six to 10 turning into hurricanes that sustain winds of at least 74 m.p.h. Three to five of those could strengthen into what NOAA calls major hurricanes — Category 3 or stronger — with winds of at least 111 m.p.h.

Last year, there were 21 named storms, after [a record-breaking 30 in 2020](#). For the past two years, meteorologists have exhausted the list of names used to identify storms during the Atlantic hurricane season, an occurrence that has happened only one other time, in 2005.

The links between hurricanes and climate change have become clearer with each passing year. Data shows that [hurricanes have become stronger worldwide](#) during the past four decades. A warming planet can expect stronger hurricanes over time, and a higher incidence of the most powerful storms — though the overall number of storms could drop, because factors like stronger wind shear could keep weaker storms from forming.

Hurricanes are also becoming wetter because of more water vapor in the warmer atmosphere; scientists have suggested storms like [Hurricane Harvey in 2017](#) produced far more rain than they would have without the human effects on climate. Also, rising sea levels are contributing to higher storm surge — the most destructive element of tropical cyclones.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Pakistan record floods; villages as islands
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/world/asia/pakistan-floods.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>DADU, Pakistan — The view from Muhammad Jaffar’s small, mud brick home in southern Pakistan used to bring him a sense of relief. Rolling fields of green cotton shrubs had started just steps from his door, their white blooms offering the promise of enough income for his family to survive the year.</p> <p>Now his fields, along with other vast swaths of Pakistan, are under green, putrid water. About two weeks ago, in one of the latest rounds of record-shattering flooding that has afflicted the country since June, his land was completely submerged, including his well for drinking water.</p> <p>“We are living on an island now,” Mr. Jaffar, 40, told visiting New York Times journalists on Tuesday.</p> <p>The devastating floods have inundated hundreds of villages across much of Pakistan’s fertile land. In Sindh Province in the south, the floodwater has effectively transformed what was once farmland into two large lakes that have engulfed entire villages and turned others into fragile islands. The flooding is the worst to hit the country in recent history, according to Pakistani officials. They warn that it may take three to six months for the floodwaters to recede.</p>

So far, around 1,500 people have died — nearly half of whom are children — and more than 33 million have been displaced from their homes by the floods, which were caused by heavier-than-usual monsoon rains and glacial melt.

Scientists say that global warming caused by greenhouse-gas emissions is sharply increasing the likelihood of extreme rain in South Asia, home to a quarter of humanity. And they say there is little doubt that it made this year's monsoon season more destructive.

In Dadu District, one of the worst hit areas in Sindh Province in southern Pakistan, the floodwater has completely submerged roughly 300 villages and marooned scores of others. Across the province, around 40,000 square miles of land — about the size of the state of Virginia — is now underwater, officials say.

Where farmers once tilled fields of cotton and wheat, wooden motorboats now chug across the festering pond ferrying people between towns that were saved from the brunt of the flooding and their stranded villages. Scattered across the water are single sandals, medicine bottles and the bright blue books of elementary students that spill out from the windows of half-submerged schools.

Swarms of mosquitoes dance around the tree tops poking out from the water. Power lines dangle precariously close to its surface.

Tens of thousands of people whose homes were destroyed have been displaced to nearby towns and cities where they have found shelter in schools, public buildings, and along the roadside and canal embankments. They take refuge in tents cobbled together with spare tarps and rope beds they salvaged before the flood came.

Among the lucky few whose villages were not completely submerged, many have remained in their homes — effectively marooned. The Pakistani authorities have urged people to leave the isolated villages, warning that if thousands remain it could overwhelm already strained aid efforts, cause widespread food insecurity and spark a health crisis as diseases spread.

But the residents have their reasons for staying, they say: They need to protect their prized valuables — surviving livestock, refrigerators and tin roofs — from thieves. The cost of renting a boat and moving their family and belongings is too high. The prospect of living in a tent encampment is too bleak.

Still, their living conditions are miserable. Malaria, dengue fever and waterborne diseases are rampant. The area has been hit with monsoon rains and heat waves since it was submerged. The government has shut off power to the area — a safety measure to prevent people from getting electrocuted — plunging the villages into darkness each night. Most villages have not received any aid, residents say.

“We are abandoned, we have to survive on our own,” said Ali Nawaz, 59, a cotton farmer who lives in Wado Khosa village in Dadu.

The village of Wado Khosa is home to around 150 people who cultivated cotton fields for a large landowner — a feudal system of farming that is common across Sindh. The cotton fields were nearly ready to harvest, residents said, when one night about two weeks ago the floodwater swelled across their fields.

Emerging from their homes at dawn, they were awe-struck. The village was completely surrounded by water that stretched to the horizon.

“My mind was not working. I was thinking what would we do — the children were sobbing,” said one resident, Nadia, 29, who like many women in rural Pakistan, goes by one name.

Since that day, the water has receded by about a foot, locals say. But life on the village-turned-island is barely survivable. Both of the village's wells were destroyed in the flood, so they must drink salt-tinged

water from a hand pump they previously only used for washing clothes and dishes. Nearly everyone in the village is sick with malaria or typhoid, Nadia said.

Simply procuring food is a feat. The price of vegetables has tripled since the flooding began, and Nadia's family can't afford to hire a boat to meet them at their remote village and take them to the market. So every few days, her cousin, Faiz Ali, 18, swims for around 20 minutes through the putrid water along what was once a road until he reaches an embankment and walks to market in the town of Johi, which survived the floods.

After buying a small portion of potatoes, rice and vegetables, he fastens the small bags of food to his back, plunges into the water and swims home. He tries to keep his head above the foul smelling lake to avoid ingesting the water and to keep an eye out for the snakes that now slither across its surface.

"It's difficult. I'm afraid — I'm still afraid every time I go," he said.

Describing the depth of the water, he stood up and lifted his hand about two feet over his head.

Their family is thankful that Johi town withstood the worst of the flooding. But they and their neighbors say they feel neglected by the government and by aid efforts, and that in the end, they saved themselves. As the floodwater began crashing through the area, residents rushed to buttress the embankment around the town — filling bags with stones, sand, grass and anything else they could find.

Since then, the town has become a critical way station for the residents living in the surrounded villages nearby. Boats making the 30 minute trip to Dadu City tie up along the main drag, where the water is somewhat shallower.

Their hulls are crowded with people, motorcycles, cows and entire herds of goats that farmers brought to the safety of Dadu when the flooding began and were now returning to their homes. At one storefront, shopkeepers laid out large solar panels in the sun and offered to charge people's phones for a small fee.

One young woman, Amira, 15, and her mother-in-law, Bali, stepped off a boat from Dadu City. Amira was clutching her newborn. A few days before, she went into labor around midnight in the makeshift camp where she and her family have been living near Johi after their village was completely submerged in the floods.

They managed to find a rickshaw to take her to Johi, and then tracked down a boat to take her to the hospital in Dadu City, where she gave birth by cesarean section. Now Amira trudged through the ankle-deep water, through the slippery mud and onto a patch of dry land as she and her family tried to make their way to a temporary home in the mountains.

Most residents say they have not received much, if any, aid from international relief organizations or the government. Occasionally, a boat arrives at the isolated villages with rice and tea from local nonprofits. But most days they simply keep watch and wait, praying for some help to arrive.

In another marooned village nearby, Munir Ahmad, 25, sat on a rope bed in the living room of his small home — its floor now caked in a thick, sticky mud from water splashing through its door. His surviving livestock — six goats, one cow and a few chickens — stood on one side of the room, while his 10-year old sister, Bakhtawar, cooked roti bread over an open flame.

Days earlier, his 5-year old son fell sick with a high fever, and Mr. Ahmad managed to hail a passing boat to take the boy and his wife to the hospital in Dadu City. Now his mother and two younger sisters are both ill, they say, either from the swarms of mosquitoes that ravage them each night or the drinking water they get from a pump nearby.

"Even the goats are sick," he said.

	Still, he says, he and his family want to stay in their home as long as it's standing.
	"I don't want to live in the tents," he said. "Home is home."
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HEADLINE	09/14 France caps energy price hikes to 15%
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/world/europe/france-gas-power-price-cap.html
GIST	<p>PARIS — France will curb electricity and gas prices that are expected to soar in 2023, as its government on Wednesday vowed to extend measures shielding French consumers from a European energy crunch that has been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Élisabeth Borne, France's prime minister, said at a news conference in Paris that the government would limit price increases to 15 percent — far less than the 120 percent hike that she said was expected without any government intervention.</p> <p>"That is the commitment we are making," she said. The plan, the government said, is expected to cost about 16 billion euros, or nearly \$16 billion.</p> <p>The announcement reflected Europe's rapid shift to big spending as governments scramble to mitigate the impact of skyrocketing energy bills.</p> <p>Russia's decision to restrict gas flows to Europe is partly driving that rise. But France is not as dependent on Russian gas for its energy production as some of its European neighbors.</p> <p>Striking a reassuring tone, Ms. Borne said that in the "likeliest scenarios" France would be able to last the winter without rationing or imposing drastic power cuts — even though its nuclear facilities, which provide about 70 percent of France's electricity, are currently plagued by technical issues.</p> <p>Earlier on Wednesday, France's electricity and gas operators had announced that widespread blackouts over the winter were unlikely but that targeted cuts during consumption peaks were possible.</p> <p>Ms. Borne said that everyone in France had a role in reducing the country's overall energy consumption, which the government aims to lower by 10 percent compared to 2021. The government will soon launch a public awareness campaign called "Each gesture counts" that will encourage households, businesses and municipalities to lower heating and turn off more lights.</p> <p>"Only sobriety and European solidarity will enable us to avoid power cuts and rationing in the most pessimistic scenarios," Ms. Borne said.</p> <p>France had already capped gas and electricity prices in 2022, and it has one of the lowest inflation rates in Europe.</p> <p>But the 15 percent cap announced on Wednesday, which will take effect in January for gas and in February for electricity, is higher than the current one. Ms. Borne said bills for households that use electrical heating would increase by about 20 euros per month, instead of 180 euros, and by about 25 euros per month for those who use gas, instead of 200 euros.</p> <p>She promised that the government would help 12 million of France's poorer households cover their energy costs with one-time checks of about 100 to 200 euros.</p> <p>"The French who are in a precarious energy situation should not bear the brunt of the efforts," Ms. Borne said.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Harborview faces long-term care shortage
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/harborview-still-way-over-capacity-as-long-term-care-shortage-persists/
GIST	<p>Harborview Medical Center continues to care for nearly 100 more inpatients than its licensed capacity as it struggles to discharge patients who no longer need hospitalization but still need significant care and have nowhere to go, the hospital's CEO said Wednesday.</p> <p>Harborview, which is publicly owned and serves as the trauma center for much of the Northwest, is licensed for 413 inpatient beds.</p> <p>It currently has about 500 inpatients, CEO Sommer Kleweno Walley told King County's Regional Policy Committee, comprising city and county government officials.</p> <p>The hospital averaged about 477 inpatients, well above its licensed capacity, through fiscal year 2022, which ended in July.</p> <p>The capacity crisis peaked a month ago when the hospital had 562 inpatients and had to divert less-acute patients to other area hospitals.</p> <p>Harborview also serves as the disaster preparedness hospital for Seattle and King County and serves difficult-to-treat populations, including people in King County jails and those with mental illness and addiction.</p> <p>"We had literally no further place to board patients," Kleweno Walley said. "The next car wreck that needed to come in, we could not care for at that point."</p> <p>The "basic life support divert" in effect for about a week in August resulted in about 10 fewer patients per day arriving at Harborview, even as the hospital continued to accept the most critically ill patients.</p> <p>The primary issue facing Harborview, as well as other hospitals in the region, is not that there are too many patients coming in; it's that it's difficult to impossible to discharge patients when they're ready to leave.</p> <p>When Harborview had those 562 patients in August, 152 of them did not need to be there, Kleweno Walley said.</p> <p>They needed to be in a long-term care or skilled nursing facility, like an adult family home, with help dressing, eating and bathing, but without the acute medical services that a hospital provides.</p> <p>About half of the state's nursing homes report being short-staffed, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, about three times more than the number reporting low staffing levels near the start of the COVID pandemic.</p> <p>"We have individuals who need to move to the next level of care, but there is no level of care to move them to," Kleweno Walley said.</p> <p>An additional 94 patients were in long-term care facilities with funding from Harborview, a program the hospital launched in 2018.</p> <p>While Harborview used the diversion program only for about a week in August, as an emergency stabilization measure, it had a spillover effect on other health care providers.</p> <p>Ambulance services have to travel longer distances to take patients to other hospitals, or have to wait with patients that can't be immediately admitted. Other hospitals, of course, have to take patients that otherwise would be at Harborview.</p>

Harborview continues to “treat and transfer” patients to other area hospitals, especially those also within the UW Medicine system, Kleweno Walley said.

Last year, Harborview had an average of 85 patients who didn’t need to be hospitalized but couldn’t be discharged because there was no facility to take them. That’s a number that has been stubbornly high for years.

Solutions tend to involve more funding. The state is providing some emergency staffing to long-term care facilities. Harborview has asked the state for help in reducing its difficult-to-discharge patient population to 50. And the hospital is asking local, state and federal officials for funding to help expand long-term care options.

The crisis in discharging patients is not unique to Harborview. Many of the state’s hospitals are near or over capacity, according to industry officials.

The Washington State Hospital Association earlier this summer said many facilities, especially in the Puget Sound region, are at 120% to 130% of their capacity.

At Swedish Health Services, about 17% of patients no longer require hospital care, chief nursing officer Kristy Carrington said in July. At MultiCare Health System, based in Tacoma, staffers were caring for 180 patients who could be discharged.

“In many ways, Harborview is the canary in the coal mine,” said King County Councilmember Pete von Reichbauer, chair of the Regional Policy Committee. “What happens at Harborview is happening throughout our region.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 ‘Quiet leaving’ from Seattle public schools
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/whos-doing-the-quiet-leaving-from-the-seattle-public-schools/
GIST	<p>Last week when I wondered why families have been pulling their kids out of Seattle Public Schools at such high rates, I got an earful.</p> <p>Except from the group that’s leaving the most. I didn’t hear much from them.</p> <p>“I’m not surprised, I think with them it’s a very quiet leaving of the school system,” says Erin Okuno, of the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition. “They say: ‘This isn’t working, but we’re not going to make a big fuss about it. We’re just going to go find something that does work for us.’”</p> <p>Okuno was talking about the broad category of “Asians” — so broad it’s made up of nearly 50 ethnic subgroups. Generalizing about it is hazardous, but state education data shows that Seattle school enrollment from pre-pandemic to now has fallen more among Asian students, by 13%, than among any other demographic or racial group.</p> <p>Between the 2019-20 school year and now, Seattle school enrollment dropped 9% among white students, 5% for Black students, and 4% for Hispanic/Latino students.</p> <p>“Because the kids were at home we could see what they were working on, and we wanted more acceleration than that,” one Asian parent of two Seattle elementary students summed up to me about why they shifted to private school.</p> <p>I heard from scores of parents, anxious to fill an information void left by the school district, which doesn’t ask why parents leave. Many echoed what the parent above said: That Zoom school, while everyone was home together, gave parents unprecedented access to what their kids were actually doing in class.</p>

“What happened is there were a lot of wealthy parents (Amazon) who pulled their kids out,” a parent at John Hay Elementary on Queen Anne wrote. “This isn’t really spoken about, but many parents have become frustrated with the SPS curriculum. During online learning they saw what they were focusing on, and many bugged out.”

John Hay lost 200 students out of 500 — 40% of the school.

Another John Hay parent wrote that he would occasionally ask his son about a friend at school, and he’d answer “Oh he’s not there anymore.”

People have theorized that low-income families have been forced out of the city by the high cost of living. That doubtless happened in some cases, but the data doesn’t bear it out as the main issue.

State data by income group shows that Seattle enrollment has dropped among middle- and high-income families at twice the rate (10%) as it did among low-income families (5%). There was such “money flight” from Seattle schools in the past two years that the overall percentage of students who qualify for the free lunch program rose for the first time in more than a decade.

“I think the extreme income-inequalities that have been building up for years are now having a huge effect on the public schools,” one elementary school parent wrote.

This is why I’m harping on this topic. It’s not to bash the schools. It’s because it feels like a dangerous pendulum is swinging — that socioeconomic stresses, already there, got supercharged by the pandemic. With the city’s public school system now in the balance.

Why did so many Asian families quietly leave, and other families “bug out?” More importantly, how could the schools get them back?

It’s not as if Seattle schools are cratering. In the just-released [round of standardized test scores](#), [Seattle schools scored](#) 12 percentage points above the statewide average in reading, and 14 points above the state average in math. Any big urban school district in the nation would swoon for results like that.

But countless parents wrote that standardized tests are only the floor. With advanced learning options taking a hit, it’s the ceiling that they say is being lowered.

“Cumulatively, it adds up to this: if you have a kid who is doing well academically, and you want to accelerate them, SPS may not be the place for you,” said a parent whose northeast Seattle elementary school lost 25% of its students.

Twelve elementary schools in the city lost more than 100 students. One school in North Seattle, Licton Springs K-8, was down to just four third graders [when school ended in June](#).

“Current elementary and middle school students will not have the same opportunities in their college pursuits as recent high school grads,” a parent of a high schooler wrote.

Added one onlooker: “The data on merit scholarship finalists tells a story: there are qualifiers in Bellevue and Redmond, but not from the Seattle public schools.”

That isn’t quite true. Last year there were [15 finalists from Seattle’s 10 high schools](#). But the writer has a point, as there were 40 from just a single Bellevue school, Interlake High.

“Next up in the downward spiral,” another frustrated parent added, “is that engaged parents with fewer means will start demanding charters, as their schools suffer funding crunches that impact quality. So you end up where [Washington] D.C. Public Schools are now.”

	Meaning: private schools mostly for the rich, fractured public schools mostly for the poor. Nothing in between.
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HEADLINE	09/14 WA, King Co. buy behavioral health facility
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/wa-and-king-county-officials-purchase-64-beds-for-behavioral-health-treatment-for-10m/
GIST	<p>King County and Washington state officials have pooled \$10 million to purchase Cascade Hall, a 64-bed behavioral health facility near Northgate.</p> <p>The announcement of the purchase Wednesday comes after officials said last month they are forming a coalition to tackle chronic behavioral health workforce shortages and other issues related to mental health and substance use.</p> <p>“In 2018, we had 388 beds in our mental health residential system,” Leo Flor, director of the Department of Community and Human Services for King County, said Wednesday at a news conference. “Today we have 266 beds — only because we’ve been able to preserve this. We do have indications from another provider that another 16-bed facility is likely to close this year.”</p> <p>King County used \$4 million in MIDD Behavioral Health funds with an additional \$6 million from Washington state to complete the purchase of the facility from Sound, one the largest nonprofit mental health providers in the county.</p> <p>Katrina Egner, the executive vice president and chief programs officer at Sound, cited shortages of behavioral health workers as one reason behind the decision to sell.</p> <p>“Sound, like many agencies, needs to take a moment sometimes and figure out where to best put our resources, and so that is why we’re exiting from Cascade Hall,” Egner said.</p> <p>The sale is in its final stages, according to county officials.</p> <p>Cascade Hall is a residential treatment facility that provides both mental health stabilization and substance use treatment. People typically live in the facility for about 2½ years before moving into other housing after stabilizing. Sound inherited the facility when it acquired Community Psychiatric Clinic in 2019.</p> <p>Starting next year, the county intends to work with Community House Mental Health, a nonprofit agency, to continue operating the facility in a new partnership.</p> <p>Chris Szala, the executive director of Community House Mental Health, said they plan to have a smooth transition where residents can get used to any new staff. Currently, the facility has a waitlist of 70 people hoping to receive residential treatment services.</p> <p>“The behavioral health system has long been underfunded, and we cannot afford to lose treatment facilities like this one,” King County Executive Dow Constantine said.</p> <p>A wide-ranging proposal to address holes in the crisis response system, a lack of beds at residential treatment centers and workforce shortages is expected to head to the Metropolitan King County Council at the end of the month alongside Constantine’s 2023-24 biennial budget, though officials have not publicly committed to a specific monetary amount.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Panel blasts WHO, govts’ Covid response
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/09/14/lancet-covid-commission-report-who/
GIST	A global panel of experts Wednesday blamed the World Health Organization, the U.S. government and others for serious failures in coordinating an international response to COVID-19, while laying out

recommendations to protect against future pandemics and reviving disputed claims about the virus's origins.

In a 45-page editorial, the Lancet COVID-19 Commission warned that many governments proved “untrustworthy and ineffective” as the pandemic tore across the world, citing examples such as richer nations hoarding vaccine doses and refusing to fund global response efforts, and politicians such as President Donald Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro playing down the virus's risks, even as hundreds of thousands of their citizens died of it.

“What we saw — rather than a cooperative global strategy — was basically each country on its own,” Jeffrey Sachs, a Columbia University economist who chaired the commission, told reporters in a briefing convened by the respected medical journal. “National leaders deciding ... the strategy and the fates of their countries in an incredibly haphazard way.”

As a result, the virus ripped through the world in “highly unequal” ways, the panel concluded, with severe consequences for the most vulnerable, among them children who suffered learning losses from disrupted schooling, people in low-income nations forced to wait for vaccine doses, and patients who endure continuing pain and other health problems attributed to long COVID.

“Global and national decisions didn't consider the less vocal voices of our communities — the ones who do not vote, like immigrants and refugees, or who do not have the energy to raise their concerns, like our elders. People that were too busy taking care of us, like essential workers and women that were at the front lines fighting the virus without professional equipment,” said Gabriela Cuevas Barrón, a Mexican politician and member of the Lancet commission.

The Lancet report also criticizes the WHO, saying the global health watchdog “acted too cautiously and too slowly” on several urgent matters, such as recognizing the virus was spreading through airborne transmission. The commission calls for strengthening the United Nations agency by giving it more financing and authority, and it also urges the creation of a new global health board to help the WHO make timely decisions.

In a statement, WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said the organization welcomed the commission's recommendations and concurred with its call for more funding. But Harris warned of “several key omissions and misinterpretations,” saying the panel had wrongly characterized “the speed and scope of WHO's actions.”

As health providers around the world brace for a third coronavirus winter, the commission contends that “globally coordinated efforts” can end the pandemic, urging a sustained approach to mass vaccinations, adoption of public health measures such as masking in some settings, social and financial support for infected people to continue isolating, and true cooperation among the world's most influential nations.

“China, the United States, the E.U., India, the Russian Federation, and other major regional and global powers must put aside their geopolitical rivalries to work together to end this pandemic and to prepare for the next one and for other global crises,” the report concluded.

The Lancet commission report carries no legal or regulatory authority. But its recommendations, which draw on more than two years of work from more than 170 experts, represent one of the highest-profile attempts to identify lessons from COVID-19 and how to better prepare for the next pandemic. U.S. efforts to conduct a bipartisan review of the pandemic response have stalled in Congress, and other independent bids have also struggled to win funding or capture widespread attention.

But the Lancet report also comes after Sachs, the panel's chairman, publicly embraced the “lab-leak theory,” which posits that the virus may have escaped from a laboratory and could even have man-made origins, leading to backlash from scientists who warned that his advocacy for the disputed theory would cloud the panel's work.

Government officials such as Anthony S. Fauci “are not being honest” about the virus’s origins, Sachs claimed on an August podcast with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has spread conspiracy theories about vaccines. Sachs also co-authored a May article in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that argued U.S. scientists may have had a role in shaping SARS-CoV-2 and called for a probe of the pandemic’s origin through a “bipartisan congressional inquiry with full investigative powers.”

Sachs’ advocacy provoked a private, yearlong fight with other commission members who say there is far more evidence that the virus has a “natural origin” and was first transmitted to humans from an animal, and who worked to reach a compromise over what the final report would say.

“Along with a couple of other commissioners, I helped lead efforts to keep the conspiracy nonsense and the whacka-doodle out of the final report,” said Peter Hotez, a virologist at the Baylor College of Medicine and a panel member. “I will be disappointed if COVID origin conspiracies wind up detracting from some of the important and legitimate deficiencies in our understandings of how SARS, MERS and COVID emerged.”

The commission’s report urged further investigation into both the lab-leak and natural-origins theories, faulting the National Institutes of Health for failing to provide more information about the U.S. government’s potential role in funding Chinese research into coronaviruses. “The search for origins requires unbiased, independent, transparent, and rigorous work by international teams in virology, epidemiology, bioinformatics, and other related fields,” the report concluded.

The commissioners also called for the WHO to be empowered to inspect and regulate facilities where scientists study and experiment on viruses that could spark potential pandemics. “Gain-of-function research” may result in more lethal or transmissible versions of viruses, and the commission warned that there is too little oversight over the “manipulation of dangerous pathogens.”

“Advances in biotechnology in the past two decades have made it possible to create new and highly dangerous pathogens,” the report concluded. “Even today, there is little understanding and clarity about the research on SARS-like viruses that was underway just before the COVID-19 pandemic.”

However, the report offered no new scientific information about the origin of the virus, and it did not mention two papers recently published in the journal Science that make the case the pandemic began in a market in China, not a laboratory.

Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, said she found the report’s assertions on the virus’s origins and gain-of-function research “appalling.”

“None of the relevant evidence was cited, and it’s clear why: There’s equivocation that implies an equal likelihood of natural and lab origin that is utterly inconsistent with our current scientific understanding,” Rasmussen said. “It’s hard not to think this omission is intentional to suggest that the ‘lab leak’ is more plausible than it is — as well as to advance the completely unfounded and baseless view that the pandemic resulted from so-called ‘gain of function’ research and there is a conspiracy involving both Chinese authorities and the NIH to cover it up.”

The final report comes after more than two dozen experts asserted in the Lancet in February 2020 that it was a “conspiracy theory” to consider that COVID-19 leaked from a laboratory. The publication and those authors have since faced scrutiny that the statement was rushed by scientists who were trying to preempt investigations into their own research.

The Lancet report also draws on long-held tenets in international development, arguing that universal health coverage and more financial support for international health efforts would provide necessary protections against newly emerging infectious diseases.

HEADLINE	09/14 Native American life expectancy plummets
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/native-american-life-expectancy-plummeted-from-2019-21-study-finds/
GIST	<p>Life expectancy for American Indian and Alaska Natives declined over the past two years and dropped more than other populations in the U.S., according to a recently released national study.</p> <p>For American Indian and Alaska Native people, life expectancy dropped nearly seven years, from 71.8 to 65.2 years, between 2019 and 2020. That compares to a life expectancy drop of three years during that period for the overall population.</p> <p>The last time a similar decrease happened was 1944, a year which saw some of the highest U.S. casualty numbers during World War II.</p> <p>Abigail Echo-Hawk, director of the Urban Indian Health Institute in Seattle, said the life expectancy numbers were appalling.</p> <p>“When we look at increases in mortality and decreases in life expectancy, particularly for Native people, we’re seeing the results of ongoing historical colonialism and the impact of longstanding policies that have created health disparities within the Native community,” Echo-Hawk said.</p> <p>The study identified COVID-19 as the main contributing factor in the nationwide decline, with other societal factors also playing into the steep drop in life expectancy among Native Americans. For Native Americans, factors like unintentional injuries, chronic liver disease, suicide and heart disease contributed to the steeper drop.</p> <p>“If you look at COVID-19, we were more at risk for underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular disease,” Echo-Hawk said. “Those underlying factors put us more at risk for severe complications that would result in hospitalizations and deaths.”</p> <p>She added that while COVID-19 played a role in bringing down life expectancy across different demographics in the U.S., the underlying factors already prevalent within Native communities brought the deep drop.</p> <p>“What we’re seeing is not the impact necessarily of just COVID-19 but COVID-19 exploiting the factors that created a population that was more likely to be impacted by a virus like COVID-19,” Echo-Hawk said. “These increases in mortality can’t be tied to just one specific thing.”</p> <p>The Washington State Department of Health has been tracking COVID by demographic group. Its reports show mortality rates among Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans are consistently the highest. These groups also saw disproportionately high hospitalization rates as well as case rates per 100,000 people.</p> <p>The Yakama Nation reported 61 COVID-related deaths as of December 2021. The Yakima Health District reported 613 COVID-related deaths county wide during the same period.</p> <p>Aside from a lack of access to health care, Echo-Hawk said other factors like high homicide rates on reservations due to jurisdictional misunderstandings and lack of access to quality and culturally appropriate foods can lead to a rise in diabetes rates and cardiovascular disease, all contribute to the spike in life expectancy seen in the Native community.</p> <p>Echo-Hawk added that more broadly, these contributing factors can all be attributed to centuries worth of systemic racism.</p> <p>“When we look at this drop in life expectancy, we have to look at it as a result of structural racism that has perpetuated ongoing health disparities ... I see white Americans who are benefiting from structural racism while American Indians and Alaskan Natives are dying from it,” Echo-Hawk said.</p>

	<p>Echo-Hawk said the mortality rate for Native Americans is likely an undercount, given the study does not take into account the Hispanic Native population.</p> <p>The report from the National Center for Health Statistics is based on provisional data. Life expectancy estimates can change with more data and further analysis.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Narcan vending machines to Pierce Co.
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/narcan-vending-machines-pierce-county/281-d1f2f41a-3a05-4078-9734-0d20b89c0e7d
GIST	<p>ORTING, Wash. — Orting's Recovery Café is preparing to get a new tool to help those dealing with opioid addiction.</p> <p>A vending machine will be set up in the café to dispense free Narcan, which is used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.</p> <p>It'll be one of three vending machines that will be set up across the county as part of a \$200,000 initiative through Tacoma Needle Exchange.</p> <p>The Recovery Café has been helping people overcome opioid abuse in Orting since 2018.</p> <p>But Executive Director Rena Thompson says combatting opioid abuse in smaller communities can be a challenge.</p> <p>“With us being in this rural valley area of Pierce County, it’s really hard for people to access services that are generally in Tacoma and Lakewood areas,” Thompson said. “Here in Orting, there’s not a bus line, there’s only one main road in and out of town, so it’s really helpful to have things that are lifesaving in our town.”</p> <p>The Tacoma Pierce County Health Department points to Fentanyl as the main driver of the rapid increase in opioid-related overdose, which is now the most common cause of accidental death in the county.</p> <p>There were nearly four times as many fentanyl-related deaths in 2021 as in 2019, and those deaths increased more than 80% when you compare the first half of 2021 with the first half of 2022.</p> <p>Thompson says there’s also a disturbing trend she’s seeing among the youth in Orting community. “We’ve seen an increase in opioid use among our teens,” she says.</p> <p>Thompson says having Narcan so accessible is important, so people are able to get the help they need.</p> <p>“Just because we’re a small town doesn’t mean we don’t have some of the same problems as some of the larger cities,” Thompson said. “It doesn’t just happen in Tacoma or Seattle, it happens here too. It’s just not as seen.”</p> <p>Alex Medina, lead case manager for the Café, also added that one of the other ways to help those dealing with addiction is to normalize conversations around drug use and remove the stigma around it. That way, those that need help and support feel more comfortable asking for it.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Sounder commuter train faces disruptions
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/freight-strike-amtrak-cascades-sounder-service-seattle-vancouver/281-278e9a51-9f36-478b-b939-dfb3f9348787

GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A suspension of the Sounder commuter train is something Monique Guillebeau says would have a major impact to those who have come to rely on it.</p> <p>Guillebeau, who catches the Sounder in Kent, spent years in traffic. She and others say service suspension due to a possible freight railroad strike would be devastating.</p> <p>"That means I have to get up earlier to make sure I get to work on time," she said. "Where this is a guarantee I don't have to deal with the traffic or gas."</p> <p>Sounder commuter rail service between Everett and Lakewood would be suspended if unionized freight railroad workers vote to strike.</p> <p>Amtrak train service between Seattle and Portland would also be suspended.</p> <p>Sound Transit announced it is working with partners on additional bus service on existing express routes that overlap with Sounder service.</p> <p>The Amtrak Cascades line, which is set to resume in full Monday, Sept. 26 with service up to Vancouver, British Columbia, and Sounder service cannot operate without BNSF Railway and Union Pacific employees.</p> <p>A strike would result in "complete service disruptions" beginning Sept. 16, according to information from Amtrak.</p> <p>The train tracks that Amtrak and Sounder trains run on in Washington state are primarily owned by BNSF and Union Pacific.</p> <p>People with Amtrak tickets are being notified of the situation and have the option to change their reservation to another date, according to Amtrak, waive a difference in fare for departures through Oct. 31 or receive a refund.</p> <p>The announcement comes after Amtrak suspended all long-distance routes on Wednesday.</p> <p>Meanwhile, freight railroads and their unions face a looming strike deadline on Friday to settle their contract dispute.</p> <p>There are 12 unions representing 115,000 workers that must agree on tentative deals and have their members vote on whether to approve them. So far, nine have agreed to tentative deals while three others are still bargaining.</p> <p>Though the negotiations don't involve Amtrak, most of the company's 21,000 route miles outside of the Northeast Corridor are on tracks owned, maintained and dispatched by freight railroads.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Eatonville teachers reach tentative deal
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/education/eatonville-teachers-strike/281-69de86ce-73d5-4a7b-97bf-661cf52f254b
GIST	<p>The Eatonville Education Association (WWA) and school district reached a tentative contract agreement Wednesday evening.</p> <p>The agreement must still be ratified to allow a vote by union members, before being sent to the school board for formal approval.</p> <p>The first day of school has a tentative start date of Sept. 16 for students in first through 12th grade. Preschool students tentatively start Sept. 19. Kindergarten tentatively starts Sept. 21.</p>

The tentative agreement comes after six days of picketing by educators.

EEA said smaller class sizes are a top priority.

There are about 1,800 students enrolled in the Eatonville School District.

Brothers Hank and Carson Benham are still on summer break, one that's been extended by a week in Eatonville.

"I really love coming here and riding my scooter in the skate park," said Hank, who is preparing to start fifth grade.

While the brothers are making the most of the time off, they say they'd rather be in the classroom.

"Because I have a really good teacher," said Carson, who will be in third grade.

"The process has been moments of hope and then moments of frustration," said Michael Sniezak, the president of the EEA.

Sniezak said union members submitted a letter of No Confidence in Superintendent Gary Neal, urging the school board to call for his immediate resignation. Neal has had the job for about a year.

"We want our students to be the number one priority for him. We didn't feel that was the case. So that's how the vote of no confidence came into play," said Sniezak.

An ESD spokesperson said the superintendent was unavailable for an interview on Wednesday because the district's team is at the bargaining table.

"We're trying to bargain for money that was already guaranteed to us in our last contract," Sniezak said.

According to the district's website, teachers have been offered a 6.5% raise while the union is proposing an increase of 8.5%. Sniezak says pay is not the main sticking point.

"It's our class size issues and our support for our students, that is really what keeps us separated," he said.

Sniezak added that he's seen families showing their support for teachers.

"To know that the community is right behind us, it makes these long days a little bit less exhausting," he said.

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HEADLINE	09/14 China Covid lockdown: hunger complaints
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-lockdown-xinjiang-residents-complain-hunger-89865800
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Residents of a city in China's far western Xinjiang region say they are experiencing hunger, forced quarantines and dwindling supplies of medicine and daily necessities after more than 40 days in a virus lockdown.</p> <p>Hundreds of posts from Ghulja riveted users of Chinese social media last week, with residents sharing videos of empty refrigerators, feverish children and people shouting from their windows.</p> <p>The dire conditions and food shortages are reminiscent of a harsh lockdown in Shanghai earlier this year, when thousands of residents posted complaints online that they were delivered rotting vegetables or denied critical medical care.</p>

But unlike in Shanghai, a glittering, cosmopolitan metropolis of 20 million people and home to many foreigners, the harsh lockdowns in smaller cities such as Ghulja have received less attention until recently.

As more infectious variants of the coronavirus creep into China, flareups have become increasingly common. Under China's "zero-COVID" strategy, tens of millions of people are experiencing rolling lockdowns, paralyzing the economy and making travel uncertain.

The lockdown in Ghulja is also evoking fears of police brutality among the Uyghurs, the Turkic ethnic group native to Xinjiang. For years, the region has been the target of a sweeping security crackdown, ensnaring huge numbers of Uyghurs and other largely Muslim minorities in a vast network of camps and prisons. An earlier lockdown in Xinjiang was particularly tough, with forced medication, arrests and residents being hosed down with disinfectant.

Yasinuf, a Uyghur studying at a university in Europe, said his mother-in-law sent fearful voice messages this past weekend saying she was being forced into centralized quarantine because of a mild cough. The officers coming for her reminded her of the time her husband was taken to a camp for over two years, she said.

"It's judgment day," she sighed in an audio recording reviewed by The Associated Press. "We don't know what's going to happen this time. All we can do now is to trust our creator."

Food has been in short supply. Yasinuf said his parents told him they were running low on food, despite having stocked up before the lockdown. With no deliveries, and barred from using their backyard ovens for fear of spreading the virus, his parents have been surviving on uncooked dough made of flour, water and salt. Yasinuf declined to give his surname for fear of retribution against his relatives.

He hasn't been able to study or sleep in recent days, he said, because thoughts of his relatives back in Ghulja keep him up at night.

"Their voices are always in my head, saying things like I'm hungry, please help us," he said. "This is the 21st century, this is unthinkable."

Nyrola Elima, a Uyghur from Ghulja, said her father was rationing their dwindling supply of tomatoes, sharing one each day with her 93-year-old grandmother. She said her aunt was panicking because she lacked milk to feed her 2-year-old grandson.

Last week, the local governor apologized at a news conference for "shortcomings and deficiencies" in the government's response to the coronavirus, including "blind spots and missed spots," and promised improvements.

But even as authorities acknowledged the complaints, censors worked to silence them. Posts were wiped from social media. Some videos were deleted and reposted dozens of times as netizens battled censors online.

Multiple people in the region told AP the posts online reflected the dire nature of the lockdown, but declined to detail their own situations, saying they feared retribution.

On Monday, local police announced the arrests of six people for "spreading rumors" about the lockdown, including posts about a dead child and an alleged suicide, which they said "incited opposition" and "disrupted social order."

Leaked directives from government offices show that workers are being ordered to avoid negative information and spread "positive energy" instead. One directed state media to film "smiling seniors" and "children having fun" in neighborhoods emerging from the lockdown.

“Those who maliciously hype, spread rumors, and make unreasonable accusations should be dealt with in accordance with the law,” another notice warned.

The AP was unable to independently verify the notices. China's Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

As the authorities mobilize, conditions have improved for some. One resident, reached by phone, said food deliveries resumed after stopping for a couple of weeks. Residents in her compound are now allowed to take walks in their courtyard for a few hours a day.

“The situation is gradually improving, it’s gotten a lot better,” she said.

Authorities have ordered mass testing and district lockdowns in cities across China in recent weeks, from Sanya on tropical Hainan island to southwest Chengdu, to the northern port city of Dalian.

In the city of Guiyang, in mountainous southern Guizhou province, a zoo put out a call for help last week, asking for pork, chicken, apples, watermelons, carrots and other produce out of concern they could run out of food for their animals.

Elsewhere in the city, residents in one neighborhood complained of hunger and missing food deliveries, prompting a surge of comments online. Local officials apologized, saying that despite their best efforts, they were overwhelmed.

“Due to lack of experience and inappropriate methods,” they said in a public notice, “the supply of basic necessities wasn’t enough, bringing inconvenience to everyone. We are deeply sorry.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 WHO: Covid ‘end in sight’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-end-sight-deaths-lowest-march-2020-89894350
GIST	<p>GENEVA -- The head of the World Health Organization said Wednesday that the number of coronavirus deaths worldwide last week was the lowest reported in the pandemic since March 2020, marking what could be a turning point in the years-long global outbreak.</p> <p>At a press briefing in Geneva, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the world has never been in a better position to stop COVID-19.</p> <p>“We are not there yet, but the end is in sight,” he said, comparing the effort to that made by a marathon runner nearing the finish line. “Now is the worst time to stop running,” he said. “Now is the time to run harder and make sure we cross the line and reap all the rewards of our hard work.”</p> <p>In its weekly report on the pandemic, the U.N. health agency said deaths fell by 22% in the past week, at just over 11,000 reported worldwide. There were 3.1 million new cases, a drop of 28%, continuing a weeks-long decline in the disease in every part of the world.</p> <p>Still, the WHO warned that relaxed COVID testing and surveillance in many countries means that many cases are going unnoticed. The agency issued a set of policy briefs for governments to strengthen their efforts against the coronavirus ahead of the expected winter surge of COVID-19, warning that new variants could yet undo the progress made to date.</p> <p>“If we don’t take this opportunity now, we run the risk of more variants, more deaths, more disruption, and more uncertainty,” Tedros said.</p> <p>The WHO reported that the omicron subvariant BA.5 continues to dominate globally and comprised nearly 90% of virus samples shared with the world's biggest public database. In recent weeks, regulatory</p>

authorities in Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere have cleared tweaked vaccines that target both the original coronavirus and later variants including BA.5.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, said the organization expected future waves of the disease, but was hopeful those would not cause many deaths.

Meanwhile in China, residents of a city in the country's far western Xinjiang region have said they are experiencing hunger, forced quarantines and dwindling supplies of medicine and daily necessities after more than 40 days in a lockdown prompted by COVID-19.

Hundreds of posts from Ghulja riveted users of Chinese social media last week, with residents sharing videos of empty refrigerators, feverish children and people shouting from their windows.

On Monday, local police announced the arrests of six people for “spreading rumors” about the lockdown, including posts about a dead child and an alleged suicide, which they said “incited opposition” and “disrupted social order.”

Leaked directives from government offices show that workers are being ordered to avoid negative information and spread “positive energy” instead. One directed state media to film “smiling seniors” and “children having fun” in neighborhoods emerging from the lockdown.

The government has ordered mass testing and district lockdowns in cities across China in recent weeks, from Sanya on tropical Hainan island to southwest Chengdu, to the northern port city of Dalian.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Calif. mudslides; wildfire gains strength
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/california-cleans-mudslides-fire-gains-strength-89891888
GIST	<p>OAK GLEN, Calif. -- Rescuers searched Wednesday for a person missing in a mudslide that swept boulders down fire-scarred slopes and damaged or destroyed 30 homes in the Southern California mountains as firefighters in the northern part of the state tried to contain an explosive week-old blaze.</p> <p>Dogs aided the hunt for a person missing in a heavily damaged area of the San Bernardino Mountains east of Los Angeles where thunderstorms unleashed rocks, trees and earth that washed away cars, buried homes and affected 3,000 residents in two remote communities.</p> <p>The force of mud barreling down the mountain late Monday drove a dumpster through the walls of the Oak Glen Steakhouse and Saloon. A massive tree lodged in the dining room, muck was waist-deep in the kitchen and wine bottles were slathered in mud.</p> <p>“We have trees in there ... 30 feet long that came straight through our building,” said Brandon Gallegos, whose family owns the restaurant. “It’s crushing.”</p> <p>As the search, cleanup and damage assessment continued, firefighters in Northern California tried to tamp down a fire that flared up Tuesday and jumped a fork of the American River and on Wednesday became the largest blaze in the state this year. Evacuations were increased to more than 11,000 people as the fire threatened over 9,000 structures.</p> <p>The muddy damage in Oak Glen and Forest Falls served as a powerful warning to residents of areas that have burned or are facing high fire danger of the damage wildfires can cause months or even years after flames are extinguished and the smoke clears.</p> <p>An intense amount of rain even over a short period of time can have catastrophic effects on hillsides where fire has stripped vegetation that once held the ground intact.</p>

In January 2018, mudslides thundered down a steep mountainside that burned a month earlier and killed more than 20 people in the tony beachside town of Montecito near Santa Barbara. The worst of the rain fell in a 15-minute span with Montecito getting little more than a half-inch (1.25 centimeter) in five minutes.

Jim Topelski, a San Bernardino County fire chief, said mudslides had been a concern in the area burned by the deadly El Dorado Fire that was sparked two years ago when a couple used a smoke device to reveal their baby's gender. The couple was charged with involuntary manslaughter in the death of a firefighter.

On Monday, nearly 2 inches (5 centimeters) of rain fell top Yucaipa Ridge between Oak Glen, home to apple orchards that are a fall tourist destination, and Forest Falls, once a summer getaway for cabin owners that has become a bedroom community.

"The mud and debris flow came down through the high steep terrain," Topelski said. "This entire area is blanketed with up to 6 feet (1.83 meters) of mud, debris, large boulders."

Mudflows had washed into Forest Falls a month ago, closing roads, but damaging no homes.

Residents in the area had been warned of the danger lurking above them, so they were dismayed but not surprised, Gallegos said.

"We were just hoping and praying that it wouldn't happen, but it did happen," he said.

A video captured the spectacle of mud flowing like lava past the sign for Gallegos' restaurant under sunny skies. It was followed seconds later by a faster-moving and deeper surge of sludge carrying logs and sweeping across a road.

Out of view in the video was the damage being done as tons of mud poured into the tavern.

Evacuation orders remained in two areas over possible mudslides as well as to help workers clear roads buried in muck and restore water and power.

The burst of rain followed a rare tropical storm that ended a lengthy statewide heat wave last week that had pushed electrical supplies to the brink of power outages.

While the temporary relief was welcome in the drought-stricken West, a spate of flash floods that followed have wreaked havoc in many places.

Cars were marooned over the weekend in Death Valley National Park and new flooding again Tuesday closed all entrances into the park. Only the east entrance was open Wednesday and the western entrance is closed indefinitely because of extensive road damage.

In a desert area outside Las Vegas, a stranded truck driver and two people in a van had to be rescued after thunderstorms dumped more than 2 inches (5.1 centimeters) of rain within three hours early Wednesday and washed basketball-sized rocks onto roads in Valley of Fire State Park.

It was a different story in Northern California, where the Mosquito Fire burned more buildings Tuesday afternoon, just hours after officials reported making "great strides." The blaze on Wednesday surpassed the size of the previous largest fire in 2022, the McKinney Fire, although this season has seen a fraction of last year's fire activity so far.

Stronger winds pushed out a smoke inversion layer Tuesday that had been stifling the blaze and gave fresh oxygen to the flames, McLean said. The area is full of extremely dry vegetation that was rapidly igniting, challenging both firefighters on the ground and air.

Scientists say climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. In the last five years, California has experienced the largest and most destructive fires in its history.

Firefighters were able to keep flames from crossing a key road and entering the town of Foresthill and cooler temperatures overnight helped keep it in check, fire spokesperson Scott McLean said Wednesday. He said some buildings burned, but the exact number won't be known until damage assessment teams were able to canvas the area.

Breezes were calmer on Wednesday afternoon and crews and helicopters knocked down hotspots.

"It's trying to come back to life," McLean said from his perch overlooking the fire. "But nothing like yesterday."

He said evacuations remain in place because of the unpredictable nature of the winds, which typically blow in the direction of several canyons in the area, which could rapidly spread flames if gusts pick up.

The blaze 110 miles (177 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco was one of three large fires in the state and had grown to roughly 100 square miles (258 square kilometers), with 20% containment Wednesday, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire. At least 64 homes and other buildings have been destroyed.

The Fairview Fire was burning about 75 miles (121 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. The 44-square-mile (114-square-kilometer) blaze was 75% contained by Wednesday night. Two people died fleeing the fire, which destroyed at least 35 homes and other structures in Riverside County.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	09/14 TikTok won't stop data flows to China?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/14/tech/tiktok-china-data/index.html
GIST	<p>TikTok repeatedly declined to commit to US lawmakers on Wednesday that the short-form video app will cut off flows of US user data to China, instead promising that the outcome of its negotiations with the US government "will satisfy all national security concerns."</p> <p>Testifying before the Senate Homeland Security Committee, TikTok Chief Operating Officer Vanessa Pappas first sparred with Sen. Rob Portman over details of TikTok's corporate structure before being confronted — twice — with a specific request.</p> <p>"Will TikTok commit to cutting off all data and data flows to China, China-based TikTok employees, ByteDance employees, or any other party in China that might have the capability to access information on US users?" Portman asked.</p> <p>The question reflects bipartisan concerns in Washington about the possibility that US user data could find its way to the Chinese government and be used to undermine US interests, thanks to a national security law in that country that compels companies located there to cooperate with data requests. US officials have expressed fears that China could use Americans' personal information to identify useful potential agents or intelligence targets, or to inform future mis- or disinformation campaigns.</p> <p>TikTok does not operate in China, Pappas said, though it does have an office in China. TikTok is owned by ByteDance, whose founder is Chinese and has offices in China.</p> <p>US concerns about TikTok were renewed after a BuzzFeed News report in June, based on leaked meeting audio, said ByteDance employees had accessed US user data on multiple occasions. In a subsequent letter</p>

to lawmakers, TikTok acknowledged the ability for China-based individuals to access US user data but highlighted cybersecurity controls that were “overseen by our US-based security team.”

Pappas affirmed in Wednesday’s hearing that the company has said, on record, that its Chinese employees do have access to US user data. She also reiterated that TikTok has said it would “under no circumstances ... give that data to China” and denied that TikTok is in any way influenced by China. However, she avoided saying whether ByteDance would keep US user data from the Chinese government or whether ByteDance may be influenced by China.

Asked by Portman on Wednesday to respond to the BuzzFeed article again, Pappas said, “those allegations were not found,” without identifying a specific allegation. She then added: “There was talk [in the article] of a master account, which does not exist at our company.”

The BuzzFeed article mentions a “Beijing-based engineer as a ‘Master Admin’ who has ‘access to everything,’” but is ambiguous about whether that engineer is a ByteDance or TikTok employee.

“Again, we take this incredibly seriously in terms of upholding trust with US citizens and ensuring the safety of US user data,” Pappas said. “As it relates to access and controls, we are going to be going above and beyond in leading initiative efforts with our partner, Oracle, and also to the satisfaction of the US government through our work with [the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States], which we do hope to share more information on.”

Portman then pressed Pappas again to commit to “cutting off all data and metadata flows to China,” but Pappas simply vowed that “our final agreement with the US government will satisfy all national security concerns.”

Later, Pappas testified to Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley that the entire contents of the BuzzFeed article were false.

“We disagree with the categorization in that article wholeheartedly,” she said.

TikTok previously said it has moved its US user data to cloud servers managed by Oracle, from servers that TikTok controlled in Virginia and Singapore, and that it would eventually delete backups of US user data from those proprietary servers. It is also in ongoing talks with CFIUS, a US government body composed of multiple agencies with national security jurisdiction, about its future handling of US data.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Sweeping action against Iranian hackers
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/sweeping-action-against-iranian-hackers/
GIST	<p>The U.S. government on Wednesday announced wide-ranging punitive actions against 10 Iranians and two Iranian companies — including sanctions, indictments and multiple \$10 million rewards — related to a spree of breaches and ransomware attacks around the U.S. dating to October 2020.</p> <p>All 10 people and the two companies are affiliated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the U.S. Treasury Department said in a statement.</p> <p>The actions come less than a week after the U.S. government sanctioned Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the Minister of Intelligence, Esmail Khatib, in response to Iranian-linked cyberattacks on Albania in July. The sanctions followed the Albanian government’s decision to cut diplomatic ties with Iran over the attacks, which included ransomware attacks and wiper attacks on multiple Albanian agencies.</p> <p>A request for comment sent to the Permanent Mission of Iran at the United Nations was not immediately returned.</p> <p>According to an indictment unsealed today, Mansour Ahmadi, Ahmad Khatibi and Amir Hossein Nickaein Raviri “engaged in a scheme to gain unauthorized access to the computer systems of hundreds of victims</p>

in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Iran, and elsewhere, causing damage and losses to the victims,” according to a [Department of Justice statement](#).

Each face charges of conspiring to commit computer fraud and related activity in connection to computers, intentionally damaging a protected computer and transmitting a demand in relation to damaging a protected computer. Ahmadi faces an additional count of intentionally damaging a protected computer, the DOJ said.

The State Department’s Rewards for Justice [announced rewards of up to \\$10 million each](#) for information on the suspects’ location, and the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency [released a detailed breakdown](#) of technical indicators associated with the activity.

The scheme, [outlined in a 20-page indictment](#), targeted “hundreds” small businesses, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, religious institutions and “multiple critical infrastructure sectors, including healthcare centers, transportation services, and utility providers,” the DOJ said. Specific victims include a regional electric utility company in Mississippi and an electric utility company in Indiana, a public housing corporation in Washington and a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania.

“To these sorts of actors, nothing is off-limits,” [FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a video message](#) posted Wednesday. “Not even, for example, Boston Children’s Hospital, which they set their sights on in the [summer of 2021](#). Fortunately, before they could successfully launch their attack, we received a tip from a partner that the hospital had been targeted.”

“While indictments such as these may not have a significant impact, they nonetheless help,” said Brett Callow, a threat analyst at cybersecurity firm Emsisoft. “There’s no silver bullet to ransomware. Solving the problem requires action on multiple fronts to target threat actors, their infrastructures and their supply chains. While ransomware will not cease to be overnight, or possibly ever, we are now seeing more effective action being taken, and that’s a good thing.”

The three defendants — along with seven others — were also sanctioned in connection with the allegations. Afkar System Yazd Company, owned by Khatibi, and Najee Technology Hooshmand Fater LLC, owned by Mansour, were also sanctioned, and the FBI issued an official wanted notice...

Earlier Wednesday, researchers with the [Secureworks Counter Threat Unit Research Team released an analysis](#) discussing at least part of the ransomware activity confirmed by the U.S. government. The research showed that the name “ahmad khatibi” was included in the metadata in a ransom note created in December 2021, along with time zone data corresponding to Iran Standard Time.

Khatibi’s LinkedIn profile lists him as CEO of Afkar System, the Secureworks researchers said.

“We’ve seen first-hand the damage this group can wreak, how they’ve blurred the lines between e-crime and espionage,” Rafe Pilling, the senior security researcher with the Secureworks Counter Threat Unit, told CyberScoop Wednesday after the government’s news went public. “Oftentimes it can seem that threat groups can act without fear of any consequences. Indictments such as today’s are important in showing that’s not the case. I would caution that whilst the indictment is a welcomed step, it doesn’t dissolve the threat — companies need to remain vigilant.”

Secureworks noted that this summer, an anti-Iranian regime whistleblower persona, Lab_Dookhtegan, shared information on the company. On June 15, the Lab_Dookhtegan Telegram channel posted phone numbers and an address for Afkar System, and had previously shared information on Najee Technology.

A representative of the group told CyberScoop Wednesday in an online chat that “we sent information to the FBI,” but did not elaborate.

“Though the company says that it is a regular company (photos attached), this company is actually a cover company for the Intelligence Organization of Sepah,” the persona said in its Telegram post. “These two

	<p>companies (Najee Technology and Afkar System) do cyber-attacks for the Intelligence Organization of Sepah,” referring to an internal IRGC unit.</p> <p>The Treasury Department said in its statement that although the people named Wednesday do not “directly align” with a named threat group, some of the activity can be partially attributable to activity tracked by various private cybersecurity companies as known threat groups known as APT35, Charming Kitten, Nemesis Kitten, Phosphorus and Tunnel Vision.</p> <p>John Hultquist, the vice president of Intelligence for cybersecurity firm Mandiant, said in a statement Wednesday that the indictments focus on “criminal activity of Iranian actors Mandiant has tracked for some time” under the designation of UNC2448.</p> <p>“We believe these organizations may have been moonlighting as criminals in addition to their status as contractors in the service of the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps],” Hultquist said. “The IRGC leans heavily on contractors to carry out their cyber operations.”</p> <p>The group has carried out “brazen, widespread vulnerability scanning” against targets in the U.S., Canada, Israel, UAE and Saudi Arabia,” Hultquist said. “More often than not, they are monetizing their access, but their relationship to the IRGC makes them especially dangerous. Any access they gain could be served up for espionage or disruptive purposes.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Targeting student loan forgiveness plan
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/social-engineering/fraudsters-aim-to-capitalize-on-student-loan-forgiveness-confusion
GIST	<p>In recent weeks, the U.S. student loan market has been in the spotlight — not just for the much-discussed loan forgiveness plan launched by the Biden administration, but also for the segment’s growing position as a target for financial fraud.</p> <p>Indeed, just two weeks ago, it was reported widely that more than 2.5 million student loan borrowers were the victims of a massive data breach that affected both EdFinancial and Oklahoma Student Loan Authority accounts. As with many recent financial institution breaches, this particular attack emanated initially from Nelnet Servicing, a large technology services vendor to student lenders. Unknown bad actors may have gained access to a wide range of account-holder information, including names, home and email addresses, phone numbers and Social Security numbers during June and July of this year. (Nelnet has insisted that financial account information was not compromised in this attack.)</p> <p>As with the recent KeyBank mortgage account breach, news of the massive compromise of student loan accounts was met with relatively swift legal action. Last Wednesday, a class-action lawsuit citing “breach of contract” was filed in the Nebraska district court against Nelnet Servicing, which is based in that state. The plaintiffs were student loan borrowers who said they were impacted by the incident. Similar to the KeyBank breach and subsequent legal action, the suit has honed in on the apparent delay of more than one month between the third-party service provider (in this case, Nelnet Servicing) finding the unauthorized access and notifying the student lenders that their borrower-customers might be affected.</p> <p>“When an organization discovers a vulnerability for specific accounts or data, it is most likely related to infrastructure or systems that were misconfigured or not fully patched,” said James McQuiggan, security awareness advocate at KnowBe4. “Cybercriminals search for those weaknesses and attack the systems to gain access quickly. When patches and updates are available for critical systems, it is crucial that organizations quickly remediate the risk or patch the system.”</p> <p>Opportunistic scams emerge after newsworthy events</p> <p>However, various issues can challenge the risk reduction and patch process — among one of the most significant is the pressure to respond to regulatory or market requirements. And here is where the student loan industry and its third-party vendors are likely to face new challenges.</p>

The recent (and some would say, controversial) new student loan forgiveness program has catapulted this segment of the U.S. financial services market front and center, creating confusion for some borrowers and pressure for lenders and hence, new opportunities for shrewd cybercriminals who realize this may have created a near-perfect environment for them to slip into systems and cash in on old and new streams of funds flowing back and forth between borrowers, lenders, the government and other parties.

When significant and newsworthy events occur, in this case the student loan forgiveness, “certain kinds of opportunists almost always show up to build scams to capitalize on the attention,” according to Tim Helming, cybersecurity evangelist with [DomainTools](#).

“A lot of these scams will involve phishing, and one of the key ways to avoid getting caught by a phishing attack is to be aware of look-alike domains and websites,” Helming added. “Threat actors are good at creating domain names that can fool a lot of users by looking very similar to legitimate domains.”

On Sept. 14, the Department of Education announced that as many as 9 million student loan borrowers who made at least one debt payment during the pandemic (between April 2020 and March of this year) are due for a refund. That wrinkle alone — while a financial benefit to student borrowers — could create a substantial opening for wily cybercriminals to more easily ply their trade here with related phishing emails and social engineering scams, or stealthy ransomware or other types of malware exploits, which leverage these huge shifts in the student loan market.

Helming pointed out that while “ransomware makes news, the losses from phishing are still considerably higher, according to the FBI ... It’s important to keep vigilant about phishing and its ‘cousins’ such as smishing [text-based phishing].”

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HEADLINE	09/14 FormBook is most used malware in August
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/formbook-knocks-off-emotet/
GIST	<p>FormBook is now the most prevalent malware found in the wild, dethroning Emotet, which has held that position since its reappearance in January.</p> <p>An info stealer targeting Windows OS, FormBook can harvest credentials, collect screenshots and monitor and log keystrokes. It can also download and execute files according to its command and control (C&C) orders. It also features robust evasion techniques and a relatively low price.</p> <p>The data comes from the latest <i>Most Wanted Malware</i> report by cybersecurity company Check Point Research (CPR), which also suggested the Android spyware Joker took third place in the mobile index and the Apache Log4j Remote Code Execution returned to first place as the most exploited vulnerability.</p> <p>Once installed, Joker can steal SMS messages and access contact lists and device information. It is also capable of signing the victim up for paid premium services without their consent. According to CPR, its rise can partially be explained by an uplift in campaigns as the malware was recently spotted in some malicious Google Play Store applications.</p> <p>“The shifts that we see in this month’s index, from Emotet dropping from first to fifth place to Joker becoming the third most prevalent mobile malware, is reflective of how fast the threat landscape can change,” said Maya Horowitz, VP of research at CPR.</p> <p>According to the executive, the figures should remind individuals and companies of the importance of keeping up to date with recent threats in order to know how to protect their systems from malware.</p> <p>“Threat actors are constantly evolving, and the emergence of FormBook shows that we can never be complacent about security and must adopt a holistic, prevent-first approach across networks, endpoints and the cloud.”</p>

	<p>In terms of additional findings, the CPR report suggested that the education/research sector remains the most targeted industry by cyber-criminals globally, followed by government/military and healthcare.</p> <p>CPR's latest <i>Global Threat Index</i> is available at this link for more numbers and figures about the most widespread malware in August.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/15 Cybercrime forums steal from site users
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cybercrime-forum-admins-spotted/
GIST	<p>Security researchers have uncovered evidence of administrators on cybercrime forums scamming their own customers.</p> <p>Threat intelligence firm Digital Shadows was sent a tip-off leading it to a cross-site scripting (XSS) forum thread. It contained direct messages between the moderator and administrator of the Altenen forum, and one unlucky user.</p> <p>Altenen is an English-language cybercrime forum that has been around for nine years. Like many similar sites, it processes payments via an escrow system – with the site admins managing the escrow account.</p> <p>In this case, a customer bought a laptop from another Altenen user, and then messaged the moderator asking them for a confirmation receipt that the money had been received. Instead, they were sent a demand for an additional ‘escrow fee’ of \$120.</p> <p>After haggling the moderator down to \$80, the user paid. However, when the purchase fell through and the user requested the escrow fee back, the moderator ceased all communication.</p> <p>A further message from the site admin revealed that the whole incident had been a scam.</p> <p>“Not all users who approached the scammers ended up becoming targets. In some cases, the user was told that it’s a scam and they’re not being targeted because of certain criteria,” Digital Shadows explained.</p> <p>“Muslims weren’t targeted, and neither were the forum’s ‘high profile’ members. This mirrors behavior seen on Russian-language forums, in which entities in the CIS region are not targeted.”</p> <p>In a separate incident, a user seeking “verified seller” status in order to sell point of sale (POS) malware on the site was asked to pay \$500 for the privilege.</p> <p>“The admin suggested that the user turn his malware development skills against the forum’s own users, by developing a Bitcoin stealer and deploying it onto the forum, as there are many users on the forum with large amounts of Bitcoin,” Digital Shadows reported.</p> <p>The cybercrime underground goes out of its way to cement trust between buyers and sellers, with most sites using rating systems not dissimilar to Amazon or eBay, to improve transparency and user experience.</p> <p>At first glance, that would seem to run at odds with the evidence uncovered by Digital Shadows. However, the scams appear to be highly targeted at certain user types to avoid alienating valuable members.</p> <p>“When an escrow scam is being perpetrated by the forum’s staff, the scammers are free to scam as many users as they wish,” Digital Shadows argued.</p> <p>“If the forum is able to attract a constant influx of naive members, it can stay online no matter what damage to its reputation is done by the scam’s revelation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 FBI: healthcare payment processors target
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-hackers-steal-millions-from-healthcare-payment-processors/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has issued an alert about hackers targeting healthcare payment processors to route payments to bank accounts controlled by the attacker.</p> <p>This year alone, threat actors have stolen more than \$4.6 million from healthcare companies after gaining access to customer accounts and changing payment details.</p> <p>Tricking victims Cybercriminals are combining multiple tactics to obtain login credentials of employees at payment processors in the healthcare industry and to modify payment instructions.</p> <p>The FBI says that it received multiple reports where hackers are using publicly available personal details and social engineering to impersonate victims with access to healthcare portals, websites, and payment information.</p> <p>Phishing and spoofing support centers are additional methods that help hackers achieve their goal of gaining access to entities that process and distribute healthcare payments.</p> <p>FBI's alert today notes that this specific threat actor activity includes sending phishing emails to financial departments of healthcare payment processors.</p> <p>They are also modifying Exchange Servers' configuration and setting up custom rules for targeted accounts, likely to receive a copy of the victim's messages.</p> <p>Millions of dollars stolen The FBI says that in just three such incidents in February and April this year, hackers diverted to their accounts more than \$4.6 million from the victims.</p> <p>In February, one threat actor used credentials "credentials from a major healthcare company" to replace the direct deposit banking information of a hospital with accounts they controlled, stealing \$3.1 million.</p> <p>In a separate incident the same month, cybercriminals used the same method to steal about \$700,000 from another victim.</p> <p>Another attack happened in April when a healthcare company with more than 175 medical providers lost \$840,000 to a threat actor that impersonated an employee and change the Automated Clearing House (ACH) instructions.</p> <p>This type of incident is neither singular nor new. The federal agency says that between June 2018 and January 2019 hackers "targeted and accessed at least 65 healthcare payment processors throughout the United States to replace legitimate customer banking and contact information with accounts controlled by the cyber criminals."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/15 Webworm hackers modify old malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/webworm-hackers-modify-old-malware-in-new-attacks-to-evade-attribution/
GIST	<p>The Chinese 'Webworm' hacking group is experimenting with customizing old malware in new attacks, likely to evade attribution and reduce operations costs.</p> <p>Webworm is a cyberespionage cluster active since at least 2017 and previously linked to attacks on IT firms, aerospace, and electric power providers in Russia, Georgia, and Mongolia.</p>

According to a [report by Symantec](#), part of Broadcom Software, the threat actors are currently testing various modified Remote Access Trojans (RATs) against IT service providers in Asia, likely to determine their effectiveness.

Old malware on a new mission

The RATs used by Webworm today are long forgotten, and their source has been circulating for many years. However, security tools still don't detect them easily, with their evasiveness, obfuscation, and anti-analysis tricks remaining relevant.

Also, using older RATs that are in wide circulation and deployed by various random hackers helps Webworm disguise their operations and blend with the activities of others, making the work of security analysts much harder.

The first old malware used in new Webworm operations is Trochilus RAT, which first appeared in the wild in 2015 and is now available freely through GitHub.

A modification added to Trochilus is that it can now load its configuration from a file by checking in a set of hardcoded directories.

The second tested strain is 9002 RAT, a popular malware among state-sponsored actors in the previous decade, who appreciated it for its capability to inject into memory and run stealthily.

Webworm added more robust encryption on 9002 RAT's communication protocol to help evade detection against modern traffic analysis tools.

The third family used in the observed attacks is Gh0st RAT, first spotted in 2008, which multiple APTs have repeatedly used in past global cyberespionage operations.

Gh0st RAT features several layers of obfuscation, UAC bypassing, shellcode unpacking, and in-memory launch, many of which are retained in Webworm's version.

A Positive Technologies report from May 2022 named the modified malware '[Deed RAT](#),' attributing it to a Chinese group they called 'Space Pirates,' that Symantec says it's most likely the same group as Webworm.

One of the new features of Deed RAT, which is essentially a modified version of Gh0st RAT, is a versatile C2 communication system supporting multiple protocols, including TCP, TLS, HTTP, HTTPS, UDP, and DNS.

Even if Space Pirates and Webworm are distinct groups, Chinese actors are known to share malware to obscure their trace and cut development costs.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Cyberattacks increasingly hands-on
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/attacks-increasingly-hands-on-break-out-more-quickly
GIST	<p>Attackers are increasingly taking a hands-on approach to network intrusions, usually avoiding using malware; they have also reduced the time it takes to move from an initial compromise to infecting other systems in a network.</p> <p>That's according to cybersecurity services firm CrowdStrike, which found in a report published Tuesday that both targeted attacks and interactive intrusions have increased overall. For the 12 months ending in June, targeted attacks accounted for 18% of all attacks, up from 14% for the prior 12 months, according to the firm's telemetry.</p>

Attackers also focused on interactive intrusions that take a hands-on approach to compromises, with an almost 50% increase in such attacks, the company found. Unsurprisingly, the increase in hands-on attacks meant less reliance on malware — 71% of all events detected by CrowdStrike indicated malware-free activity, the company said.

The technology sector continued to be the focus of the most attacks, with nearly 20% of attacks targeting the industry sector, while telecommunications became the second most targeted at 10%, and manufacturing accounting for about 8% of attacks. Cybercriminal attacks accounted for 43% of all security incidents investigated by CrowdStrike, [the firm stated in the report](#).

A Rise in Nation-State Cyberattacks

The shifts in cyberattacker tactics have come from specialized cybercrime offerings and an increase in nation-state attacks, says Param Singh, vice president of CrowdStrike's Falcon OverWatch group.

"This surge is being driven in part by the evolving e-crime landscape which has seen an unprecedented number of new criminally motivated adversary groups emerging and joining the fold in an attempt to capitalize on the lucrative opportunities for financial gain," he says. "Additionally, there has been a prolonged rise in targeted intrusion activity on the part of state-based adversaries in response to the evolving geopolitical landscape and global macro events."

More compromised credentials and more services means that adversaries are able to quickly choose vulnerable systems and gain access essentially on demand, which leads to faster breakout times, he says. At the same time, because advanced actors can use the same access-for-service tools, they are able to gain a beachhead and interactively hack their victim.

A shorter breakout time would normally suggest that attackers are using more automation, but CrowdStrike's threat hunters found that attackers are using interactive hacking more often. There are two separate trends at play, says Singh.

"[T]he ongoing surge in ransomware-as-a-service and affiliate networks along with increasing prevalence of access broker activity all adds up to one thing: a lower barrier to entry for criminally motivated adversaries," Singh says. "In practice, this translates to adversaries being able to operationalize an attack and both gain initial access easier and move laterally to additional hosts faster than previously seen."

CrowdStrike pointed toward the Russia-Ukraine conflict as one factor for the growth in targeted attacks, but China remains the most prolific attacker, according to the company's data.

"A look back at the numerous geopolitical and macro global events that have taken place have shown both China and Russia to be outspoken," Singh says. "While a greater proportion of attributable malicious activity has been linked back to China-nexus adversaries, it is our assessment that Russian adversaries continue to operate. However, it is possible that this activity currently falls under the unattributed category of intrusions."

Mystery Assailants

Meanwhile, the share of detected security incidents that remain unattributed continues to be high. In the 12 months ending June 2022, 38% of intrusion campaigns could not be positively attributed to a specific group, about the same (39%) as the previous 12 months.

"[T]here are often few identifiable artifacts or examples indicative of tradecraft to investigate, which prevents high-confidence attribution," CrowdStrike stated in [the report](#). "This issues is compounded by the continued blurring of the lines between eCrime and targeted intrusion tradecraft and tooling, which also curtails high-confidence attribution."

To keep up with attackers' speed and break their chain of attack, defenders need to both deploy technology-based controls and use human-based threat-hunting services to catch signs of attackers and subvert their automated attacks and hands-on hacking.

"When it comes to breaking that chain, the reality is that adversaries are moving faster, in some cases in mere minutes," Singh says. "Pairing this observation with the increasing proliferation of compromised account usage with the diminishing reliance on malware means defenders must extend their defensive capabilities beyond technology alone."

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HEADLINE	09/14 TeamTNT hits Docker containers
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/teamtnt-docker-containers-malicious-cloud-images
GIST	<p>An apparent operational security slip-up by a member of the TeamTNT threat group has exposed some of the tactics it's using to exploit poorly configured Docker servers.</p> <p>Security researchers from Trend Micro recently set up a honeypot with an exposed Docker REST API to try and understand how threat actors in general are exploiting vulnerabilities and misconfigurations in the widely used cloud container platform. They discovered TeamTNT — a group known for its cloud-specific campaigns — making at least three attempts to exploit its Docker honeypot.</p> <p>"On one of our honeypots, we had intentionally exposed a server with the Docker Daemon exposed over REST API," says Nitesh Surana, threat research engineer at Trend Micro. "The threat actors found the misconfiguration and exploited it thrice from IPs based in Germany, where they were logged in to their DockerHub registry," Surana says. "Based on our observation, the motivation of the attacker was to exploit the Docker REST API and compromise the underlying server to perform cryptojacking."</p> <p>The security vendor's analysis of the activity eventually led to uncovering credentials for at least two DockerHub accounts that TeamTNT controlled (the group was abusing DockerHub free Container Registry services) and was using to distribute a variety of malicious payloads, including coin miners.</p> <p>One of the accounts (with the name "alpineos") hosted a malicious container image containing rootkits, kits for Docker container escape, the XMRig Monero coin miner, credential stealers, and Kubernetes exploit kits.</p> <p>Trend Micro discovered the malicious image had been downloaded more than 150,000 times, which could translate into a wide swath of infections.</p> <p>The other account (sandeep078) hosted a similar malicious container image but had far fewer "pulls" — just about 200 — compared with the former. Trend Micro pointed to three scenarios that likely resulted in the leak of the TeamTNT Docker registry account credentials. These include a failure to logout from the DockerHub account or their machines being self-infected.</p> <p>Malicious Cloud Container Images: A Useful Feature</p> <p>Developers often expose the Docker daemon over its REST API so they can create containers and run Docker commands on remote servers. However, if the remote servers are not properly configured — for instance, by making them publicly accessible — attackers can exploit the servers, Surana says.</p> <p>In these instances, threat actors can spin up a container on the compromised server from images that execute malicious scripts. Typically, these malicious images are hosted on container registries such as DockerHub, Amazon Elastic Container Registry (ECR), and Alibaba Container Registry. Attackers can use either compromised accounts on these registries to host the malicious images, or they can establish their own, Trend Micro has previously noted. Attackers can also host malicious images on their own private container registry.</p> <p>Containers that are spun up from a malicious image can be used for a variety of malicious activities, Surana notes. "When a server running Docker has its Docker Daemon publicly exposed over REST API, an attacker can abuse and create containers on the host based on attacker-controlled images," he says.</p>

A Plethora of Cyberattacker Payload Options

These images may contain cryptominers, exploit kits, container escape tools, network, and enumeration tools. "Attackers could perform crypto-jacking, denial of service, lateral movement, privilege escalation, and other techniques within the environment using these containers," according to the analysis.

"Developer-centric tools like Docker have been known to be abused extensively. It's important to educate [developers] at large by creating policies for access and credential use, as well as generate threat models of their environments," Surana advocates.

Organizations should also ensure that containers and APIs are always properly configured to ensure that exploits are minimized. This includes ensuring that they are accessible only by the internal network or by trusted sources. In addition, they should follow Docker's guidelines for strengthening security. "With the rising number of malicious open source packages targeting user credentials," Surana says, "users should avoid storing credentials in files. Instead, they are advised to choose tools such as credential stores and helpers."

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HEADLINE	09/15 Cyber crooks exploit Queen's death
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/135764/cyber-crime/queen-elizabeth-ii-phishing.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Researchers from Proofpoint are warning of threat actors that are using the death of Queen Elizabeth II as bait in phishing attacks.</p> <p>The attackers aim at tricking recipients into visiting sites designed to steal their Microsoft account credentials and MFA codes.</p> <p>The messages sent to the victims purported to be from Microsoft and invited recipients to an "artificial technology hub" in Queen Elizabeth II honor.</p> <p>The content of the message informs the recipients that Microsoft is launching an interactive AI memory board in honor of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and invites them to contribute to its creation by accessing it using their Microsoft account credentials</p> <p>Upon clicking the button embedded within the email, the recipients are redirected to the phishing landing page where they're asked to enter their Microsoft credentials.</p> <p>The phishing page (hxxps://auth[.]royalqueenelizabeth[.]com/?) has been created with the recently discovered EvilProxy phishing kit.</p> <p>The landing page is hxxps://auth[.]royalqueenelizabeth[.]com/?</p> <p>EvilProxy actors are using Reverse Proxy and Cookie Injection methods to bypass 2FA authentication – proxyfying victim's session. Previously such methods have been seen in targeted campaigns of APT and cyberespionage groups, however, now these methods have been successfully productized in EvilProxy which highlights the significance of growth in attacks against online-services and MFA authorization mechanisms.</p> <p>The first mention of EvilProxy was detected in early May 2022, this is when the actors running it released a demonstration video detailing how it could be used to deliver advanced phishing links with the intention to compromise consumer accounts belonging to major brands such as Apple, Facebook, GoDaddy, GitHub, Google, Dropbox, Instagram, Microsoft, Twitter, Yahoo, Yandex and others.</p> <p>EvilProxy uses the "Reverse Proxy" principle. The reverse proxy concept is simple: the bad actors lead victims into a phishing page, use the reverse proxy to fetch all the legitimate content which the user expects including login pages – it sniffs their traffic as it passes through the proxy. This way they can</p>

	<p>harvest valid session cookies and bypass the need to authenticate with usernames, passwords and/or 2FA tokens.</p> <p>EvilProxy is offered on a subscription base, when the end user (a cybercriminal) chooses a service of interest to target (e.g., Facebook or LinkedIn), the activation will be for a specific period of time (10, 20 or 31 days as per the description of the plan which was published by the actors on multiple Dark Web forums).</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 SIM swappers turn to more violent activities
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/3advxi/firebombings-shootings-as-a-service-telegram
GIST	<p>Cybercriminal communities focused on SIM swapping, where hackers take over a target's phone number to then break into their online accounts, have pivoted to dramatically more violent activities: paying one another to fire guns into peoples' houses, throw bricks through their windows, firebomb buildings, or even advertise offers to rape specific people on their payers behalf, according to Telegram posts offering the "services" viewed by Motherboard.</p> <p>The news signals the continuing evolution, or degradation, of the SIM swapping community. As telecoms have introduced measures designed to make SIM swapping harder, some hackers have moved to more aggressive tactics such as deploying malware inside telecoms' networks. The move into crimes squarely in the physical world shows how some members of these loose knitted groups are trying to make money or settle disagreements.</p> <p>It is not clear how many of these adverts may be genuine offers or scams. But this sort of activity is happening inside the SIM swapping community. Earlier this month cybersecurity reporter Brian Krebs reported on charges against Patrick McGovern-Allen who was arrested August 12 by the FBI. According to the report, McGovern-Allen and an unidentified co-conspirator fired multiple handgun rounds into a house in West Chester, Pa. Krebs obtained an apparent video of that incident, as well as another of people throwing a firebomb at another house. The complaint said that police officers agreed the same suspect was present in both videos, Krebs wrote.</p> <p>The complaint said that a Discord user allegedly used by McGovern-Allen later said he was the person who shot at the house and that he was willing to conduct firebombings.</p> <p>"If you need anything done for \$ lmk/I did a shooting/Molotov/but I can also do things for ur entertainment," the Discord message read according to the report.</p> <p>Those advertisements are similar to the ones uncovered by Motherboard, many of which were posted after Krebs' piece.</p> <p>One user in a Telegram group focused on SIM swapping said last week they "are now offering 'hits'. That includes, house shootings, bricking, messages at doors and more."</p> <p>Another offered "mild," "medium," and "full" beatings. The full beating includes a broken limb, bloody nose, concussion, and the victim coughing up blood, for \$1,000, the post reads.</p> <p>Other users of the same Telegram groups have looked for people willing to brick residences. "Hey need some house bricked dm if your <i>[sic]</i> in the 475 area code," one post read last week, referring to an area code of Connecticut.</p> <p>"Need a bricking job done in atlanta, PM me," another person wrote last week.</p> <p>Another earlier message posted in June found by Motherboard reads "Doing irl jobs me me (rape, shootings, brick)".</p>

	Someone in the same group responded to that message and said “bro what has the tele com came to man,” seemingly referring to the downward spiral of the SIM swapping community.
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HEADLINE	09/14 Advisory: malicious hackers linked to Iran
SOURCE	https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSCISA/bulletins/32cee0e
GIST	<p>CISA, FBI, NSA, Treasury, Cyber Command, and International Partners Release Advisory on Malicious Cyber Actors Affiliated with Iranian Government Agency</p> <p><i>Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Exploiting Vulnerabilities for Data Extortion and Disk Encryption for Ransom Operations</i></p> <p>WASHINGTON - The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Security Agency (NSA), U.S. Cyber Command Cyber National Mission Force (CNMF), the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury), the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), and the United Kingdom’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) today released a joint Cybersecurity Advisory (CSA) to highlight continued malicious cyber activity by advanced persistent threat (APT) actors affiliated with the Iranian Government’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).</p> <p>This CSA, titled, “Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Affiliated Cyber Actors Exploiting Vulnerabilities for Data Extortion and Disk Encryption for Ransom Operations,” provides actionable information regarding IRGC exploitation of VMware Horizon® Log4j vulnerabilities for initial access and ongoing use of known Fortinet® and Microsoft Exchange® vulnerabilities. After gaining access to a network, these actors likely determine a course of action based on their perceived value of the data, including data encryption or exfiltration for ransom operations.</p> <p>“Today’s advisory is an outcome of our close collaboration with international and U.S. government partners to understand and provide timely information on malicious cyber activity targeting our country’s critical networks, including by Iranian cyber actors,” said Eric Goldstein, Executive Assistant Director for Cybersecurity, CISA. “Our unified purpose is to drive timely and prioritized adoption of mitigations and controls that are most effective to reducing risk to all cyber threats, including malicious actors like those affiliated with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Immediately addressing the vulnerabilities in this advisory, which are also in CISA’s known exploited vulnerabilities catalog, and deploying rigorous controls consistent with a zero-trust strategy is strongly recommended.”</p> <p>“The FBI is dedicated to preventing and disrupting nation state affiliated cyber activity that threatens our private sector partners and the American public,” said Bryan Vorndran, FBI Cyber Division Assistant Director. “We will continue to coordinate with our domestic and international partners to proactively share relevant and timely information to mitigate cyber threats posed by the IRGC, and we are confident this advisory will assist individuals and businesses in developing a plan to protect their systems and shore up network defenses. In the event victims do suffer an intrusion, we encourage them to report the compromise as early as possible to their local FBI field office or to the Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov.”</p> <p>“This advisory points to specific instances in which IRGC-affiliated cyber actors have used publicly known vulnerabilities to gain access to U.S. critical infrastructure networks,” said David Luber, Deputy Cybersecurity Director, NSA. “We implore our net defenders and our partners to detect and mitigate this threat before your organization is the next ransomware victim.”</p> <p>“The U.S. Department of the Treasury is dedicated to collaborating with other U.S. government agencies, allies, and partners to combat and deter malicious cyber-enabled actors and their activities, especially ransomware and cybercrime that targets economic infrastructure,” said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. “This advisory identifies specific tactics, techniques, and procedures of a group of IRGC-affiliated actors who threaten the security and economy of the United States and other nations, and provides valuable information to the public and</p>

private sectors which can strengthen their cybersecurity resilience and reduce risk of ransomware incidents.”

“Cyber National Mission Force works closely with our partners to disrupt and degrade foreign malicious cyber activity, sharing threat information and taking actions to defend the Nation,” said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. William J. Hartman, commander of Cyber National Mission Force, USCC. “This multi-partner advisory highlights how Iranian cyber actors are exploiting vulnerabilities, targeting a broad range of entities including U.S. and partner critical infrastructure, and using accesses for ransom operations. When acted on, collaborative efforts like this advisory contribute to collective defenses around the world, and remove tools from those who would do us harm.”

“Ransomware remains a persistent threat. Every day, cyber threat actors—state and criminal—are seizing opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities and deliver ransomware against a growing array of targets,” said Sami Khoury, Head of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. “We strongly encourage network defenders, especially critical infrastructure partners, to read this advisory and implement these guidelines.”

“Based on the latest intelligence across the Five Eyes, this advisory again underscores that organisations of all sizes continue to be targeted by capable and increasingly sophisticated adversaries. It’s absolutely critical that organisations strengthen their cyber defences by reviewing these protective measures and implementing them immediately,” said Abigail Bradshaw CSC, Head of the Australian Cyber Security Centre. “In particular, I urge organisations to patch their systems against a number of already known critical vulnerabilities.”

This CSA identifies additional malicious and legitimate tools that are likely being used by these actors as well as tactics, techniques, and procedures, and additional indicators of compromise (IOCs) observed as recently as March 2022 that can be used to detect this latest malicious activity. Also, it is an update to the 2021 joint CSA on [Iranian government-sponsored APT actors exploiting Microsoft Exchange and Fortinet vulnerabilities](#) and now assesses this APT group to be affiliated with the IRGC, an Iranian Government agency tasked with defending the Iranian Regime from perceived internal and external threats. For more information on state-sponsored Iranian malicious cyber activity, see CISA’s [Iran Cyber Threat Overview and Advisories](#) webpage.

Organizations are strongly discouraged from paying ransoms as doing so does not guarantee files and records will be recovered and may pose sanctions risks. In September 2021, Treasury [issued an advisory](#) highlighting the sanctions risk associated with ransomware payments and providing steps that can be taken by companies to mitigate the risk of being a victim of ransomware.

All organizations should share information on cybersecurity incidents and anomalous activity to CISA 24/7 Operations Center at report@cisa.gov or (888) 282-0870 and/or to the FBI via your local FBI field office or the FBI’s 24/7 CyWatch at (855) 292-3937 or CyWatch@fbi.gov.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Charge: 3 Iranians in computer hacking plot
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220914-three-iranian-nationals-charged-with-cyber-plots-against-u-s-critical-infrastructure-providers
GIST	<p>An indictment was unsealed Wednesday charging three Iranian nationals with allegedly orchestrating a scheme to hack into the computer networks of multiple U.S. victims.</p> <p>As alleged in the indictment, from October 2020 through the present, Mansour Ahmadi, aka Mansur Ahmadi, 34; Ahmad Khatibi Aghda, aka Ahmad Khatibi, 45; and Amir Hossein Nickaein Ravari, aka Amir Hossein Nikaeen, aka Amir Hossein Nickaein, aka Amir Nikayin, 30, engaged in a scheme to gain unauthorized access to the computer systems of hundreds of victims in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Iran, and elsewhere, causing damage and losses to the victims.</p>

“The Government of Iran has created a safe haven where cyber criminals acting for personal gain flourish and defendants like these are able to hack and extort victims, including critical infrastructure providers,” said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “This indictment makes clear that even other Iranians are less safe because their own government fails to follow international norms and stop Iranian cyber criminals.”

The defendants’ hacking campaign exploited known vulnerabilities in commonly used network devices and software applications to gain access and exfiltrate data and information from victims’ computer systems. Ahmadi, Khatibi, Nickaein and others also conducted encryption attacks against victims’ computer systems, denying victims access to their systems and data unless a ransom payment was made.

DOJ says that the defendants victimized a broad range of organizations, including small businesses, government agencies, nonprofit programs and educational and religious institutions. Their victims also included multiple critical infrastructure sectors, including health care centers, transportation services and utility providers.

“Ransom-related cyberattacks — like what happened here — are a particularly destructive form of cybercrime,” said U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger for the District of New Jersey. “No form of cyberattack is acceptable, but ransomware attacks that target critical infrastructure services, such as health care facilities and government agencies, are a threat to our national security. Hackers like these defendants go to great lengths to keep their identities secret, but there is always a digital trail. And we will find it.”

“The FBI remains steadfast in our commitment to work with our U.S. government partners for the purpose of imposing cost on our adversaries,” said Assistant Director Bryan Vorndran of the FBI’s Cyber Division. “This indictment, when coupled with other disruptive operational activities, demonstrates what’s possible when we team up with our domestic and international partners and take a whole-of-government approach. We, along with our partners, remain dedicated to protecting the United States of America and the victims affected by these egregious crimes.”

According to court documents, in February 2021, the defendants and their conspirators targeted a township in Union County, New Jersey. They exploited known vulnerabilities to gain control and access to the township’s network and data and used a hacking tool to establish persistent remote access to a particular domain that was registered to Ahmadi.

In or before February 2022, the defendants and their conspirators targeted an accounting firm based in Morris County, New Jersey. They again exploited a known vulnerability to gain unauthorized access and then used a particular hacking tool to establish a connection to a server that was registered to Nickaein and to steal data. In March 2022, the defendants launched an encryption attack against the accounting firm; after denying the firm access to some of its systems, Khatibi demanded payment of \$50,000 in cryptocurrency and threatened to sell the data on the black market.

The defendants also compromised, and often encrypted and extorted, hundreds of other victims, including an accounting firm based in Illinois; a regional electric utility company based in Mississippi; a regional electric utility company based in Indiana; a public housing corporation in the State of Washington; a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Pennsylvania; a County government in Wyoming; a construction company located in the State of Washington that was engaged in work on critical infrastructure projects; and a state bar association.

Ahmadi, Khatibi and Nickaein, all residents of Iran, are each charged by indictment with one count of conspiring to commit computer fraud and related activity in connection with computers; one count of intentionally damaging a protected computer; and one count of transmitting a demand in relation to damaging a protected computer. Ahmadi is charged with one additional count of intentionally damaging a protected computer. All defendants remain at large abroad.

The conspiracy charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The intentional damage to protected computers charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. The transmission of a

	ransom demand charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The offenses also carry a potential maximum fine of \$250,000 or twice the gross amount of gain or loss resulting from the offense, whichever is greatest.
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	09/15 Guilty: Sydney leader terror group Shura
SOURCE	https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/sydney-terrorist-leader-hamdi-alqudsi-found-guilty-of-planning-attacks-20220915-p5bias.html
GIST	<p>Hamdi Alqudsi has been found guilty of planning a series of attacks as leader of a Sydney terrorist organisation known as the Shura in 2014.</p> <p>The verdict was handed down by a NSW Supreme Court jury on Thursday.</p> <p>Alqudsi knowingly directed the activities of the Shura from August to December 2014.</p> <p>His plans included attacks on the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the Garden Island Naval Base in the Sydney suburb of Woolloomooloo, a courthouse and the Australian Federal Police.</p> <p>The Shura, which means consultative council or consultation council in Arabic, was formed in 2013. Its initial intention was to send fighters from Australia to Syria in the war against government or coalition forces.</p> <p>After these aims were disrupted by the AFP and NSW Police, the group then shifted focus to domestic terrorist activity.</p> <p>Alqudsi was the leader of the group, positioning himself as “commander of the boys” and “emir of the Shura” and holding meetings at his homes in Revesby and St Helens Park, Sydney.</p> <p>He, along with many Shura members, pledged allegiance to Islamic State in a ceremony at Wattamolla Beach on August 31, 2014. IS accepted this pledge about two weeks later.</p> <p>In denying the Crown’s case, Alqudsi claimed he had no involvement with the Shura and only met its members for social occasions. He denied responsibility for the conduct of individuals within the organisation.</p> <p>Alqudsi is in custody and will be sentenced over two days starting on October 31.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	09/13 Extreme summer heat broke 7,000 records
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2022/temperature-records-summer/?itid=hp_Climate%20box
GIST	<p>It was the summer that wouldn’t quit. From early June to straight past Labor Day, waves upon waves of heat scorched and baked the country, smashing thousands of temperature records along the way.</p> <p>And summer may have saved its worst for last: Oppressive heat in the West that finally broke Saturday set hundreds of records on its own. Meteorologists described it as the most extreme September heat wave ever observed in the Western United States.</p>

More than 7,000 daily temperature records across the United States were broken this summer, a Washington Post analysis of [data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) revealed. In [the third-hottest summer on record](#), more than 400 monthly records and 27 all-time records also fell.

Daily temperature records, meaning the highest temperature ever recorded at a particular station on a particular calendar date, are broken more frequently than monthly records, which indicate the highest temperature ever recorded during a whole month. Breaking all-time records — the hottest temperature recorded at a station in its entire history — is even rarer.

Such records are but one measure for tracking and quantifying summer heat. Other metrics can offer a longer-term perspective, such as a location's summer average temperature over time.

Taken together, the records show a country coping with hotter days that fuel [larger forest fires](#) and [longer, more intense droughts](#).

Tens of thousands of weather stations across the United States, from big cities to small towns, in deserts and on mountain slopes, feed data to [NOAA's daily temperature database](#). Of those stations, some 7,600 have at least 30 years' worth of daily temperature data, enough for scientists to draw long-term conclusions about climate changes. The Washington Post analyzed those stations to discover where and when records had been broken from June 1 through Sept. 7.

Heat fell upon the country in waves, causing a spate of record-breaking temperatures across the Southwest in June, wildfires that scorched Northern California and the Pacific Northwest in July, and destruction to Midwestern farms in August, culminating in a barrage of sweltering days across the West in early September.

June

Amid a June heat wave that roasted the Southwest, the weather station in Tucumcari, N.M., population 4,872, recorded an all-time high of 112 degrees on June 11.

"It was pretty brutal," said Ron Warnick, the lone full-time reporter at [the Quay County Sun](#), Tucumcari's weekly newspaper. To make matters worse, the town had to close its swimming pool because of a leak, and decades of drought have long since dried up Tucumcari Lake.

"Folks here generally handle the heat well, but I heard people complaining who are lifers in Tucumcari," Warnick said. Even his dogs refused to play outside.

The all-time high in Tucumcari was among scores of heat extremes across the country in mid-June. Daily records first were set in Phoenix, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, while Denver hit 100 degrees on June 11, tying its record for the earliest day the city hit triple digits.

As the heat wave crept east, it set records from Texas to Wisconsin. St. Louis [recorded its warmest June night](#) on record, and Milwaukee posted its highest June heat index, a measure of how hot it feels factoring in humidity, in 48 years: 109 degrees.

Late June brought searing temperatures to the Southeast, with daily record highs [being set from New Orleans to Raleigh](#).

July

July's most widespread unusual heat occurred mid-to-late month, when searing temperatures [set records in the West and South](#). Salt Lake City tied its all-time high of 107 degrees, while Oklahoma City soared to 110, its highest July temperature on record.

As Texas registered its hottest July on record, Houston hit 105 on the 10th, matching its highest temperature ever observed during the month. Austin soared to 110 the same day, establishing a July record.

To conclude July, a prolonged heat wave in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest [set records for the longest streaks with highs at or above 90 and 95 degrees](#) in Portland and Seattle, respectively. Medford, Ore., posted a high of 115 on July 29, tying its highest temperature in 111 years.

Amid this heat wave in the Northwest, a forest fire ignited on July 29 near McKinney Creek Road, by the Klamath River in Northern California. The McKinney Fire would grow into California's largest and deadliest fire of the year to date.

That day, about 55 miles to the southeast, a weather station on a mountain slope near Dunsmuir, Calif., recorded an all-time high of 106 degrees. Dunsmuir's mayor, Matthew Bryan, thought that sounded low. His thermometer hit 111, he remembered.

The wind patterns kept the McKinney Fire from threatening Dunsmuir, but the town, situated at the bottom of a canyon, is uncommonly vulnerable to fires. In recent years, [Western wildfires have become hotter and less predictable](#). Bryan said he worries that Dunsmuir could become the next Paradise, the California town that was [almost completely destroyed by the Camp Fire in 2018](#).

"It's an existential crisis," Bryan said. "It's not as if we can do anything this week, this month or this year that's going to really stop the threat."

August

August kicked off with an oppressively hot and humid air mass over the Plains. On Aug. 1, Des Moines posted a low of just 82 degrees, its warmest low temperature since 1936. Meteorologists said "[corn sweat](#)," or the moisture exhaled into the atmosphere by the crop, intensified the humidity.

The weather station in Bridgewater, S.D., a farming town of 511 people, recorded an all-time high of 107 degrees on Aug. 3.

"That first week of August was a bugger," said Lyndon Hofer, a farmer who lives six miles south of Bridgewater. "I believe it probably broke records all around."

Hofer grows corn and soybeans. In normal summers, he gets between 160 and 180 bushels of corn per acre. The drought and heat wave slashed his yields by more than three-quarters. Many acres grew nothing at all. Crop insurance covered his expenses, but he made no profit this year.

"When you get the two thrown together, extremely high temperatures and then no moisture, well, it just takes a matter of a few weeks and everything burns up," Hofer said.

In his five decades of farming, Hofer has noticed the weather upon which his livelihood depends has changed. "When it's dry, it gets drier. When it's cold, it gets colder. When it's hot, it gets hotter," he said. "If somebody asked my opinion, I'm not a big believer in climate change. But weather does seem to be getting more extreme."

America is [on pace for its lowest corn yield since the drought of 2012](#), according to analysts at Rabobank, which collects data about commodity markets. Yields in all crops could be down by as much as a third compared with last year, according to the American Farm Bureau.

The Northeast emerged as the other hot spot in early August. Boston saw six straight days at or above 95 degrees between Aug. 4 and 9, its [second-longest such stretch](#), capping the city's hottest 30-day period on record. The heat was made worse by [severe drought](#) in the region at the time. Massachusetts was among [five states](#) in the Northeast to have its warmest August on record.

September

The heat wave that gripped California and other parts of the West for more than a week was the most severe ever recorded in September, weather experts said, confirming what [California Gov. Gavin Newsom \(D\) called](#) the “hottest and longest on record” for the month.

On Sept. 7, a temperature station in Calistoga, Calif., a town of 5,346 people, hit 118 degrees.

Nearly 300 weather stations recorded their hottest September temperatures ever. Salt Lake City, Sacramento and Reno, Nev., broke their September records multiple times and by large margins.

It was the “greatest September heat wave ever west of the Rockies hands down,” [tweeted weather historian Maximiliano Herrera on Wednesday](#).

What temperature records say about climate change

In a stable climate, temperatures bob back and forth like a seesaw, equally likely to break high records as low ones. But in a warming world like ours, the seesaw is weighted toward the high side.

Over the past two decades of summers, far more record highs have been broken than record lows. This summer, more than three times as many high records were broken than low ones.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Middle East region a climate hot spot
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/rising-temperatures-turns-middle-east-region-into-climate-hot-spot-11663172120?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_2&cx_artPos=1&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>A populous region encompassing the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean has become a climate hot spot, with temperatures in recent years rising almost twice as fast as the global average, according to a new analysis of historical climate data and current observations.</p> <p>The sun-scorched region, which spans more than a dozen countries with a collective population exceeding 400 million, has warmed at a rate of 0.81 degree Fahrenheit (0.45 degree Celsius) each decade since 1981, the analysis showed. The per-decade global average rose 0.49 degree F (0.27 degree C) in the same time frame. Temperatures in the region have risen faster than in Europe, North America and other highly populous parts of the globe.</p> <p>“A hot and arid region is getting even more arid and more hot, and that has big consequences,” said Jos Lelieveld, director of atmospheric chemistry at the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Germany and the leader of the 21-member team of researchers who conducted the analysis.</p> <p>The analysis, which blamed the rising temperatures in part on the region’s barren landscape and its high carbon emissions, was published in June in the peer-reviewed journal Reviews of Geophysics.</p> <p>Along with high humidity, extreme high temperatures in summer are now common in the region, which encompasses Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. In June, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran experienced temperatures above 120 degrees F (49 degrees C). In September 2020, a Kuwaiti city reached 127 degrees F (53 degrees C).</p> <p>Dr. Lelieveld said that if the current trend continues, extreme heat and humidity, dust storms, flash floods and other heat-related weather phenomena could by midcentury render parts of the region uninhabitable during summer months for those who lack access to air conditioning.</p> <p>“They already have short periods in which the survivability threshold has been approached, and that will become more frequent,” said Tapio Schneider, professor of environmental science and engineering at the California Institute of Technology. He wasn’t involved in the new research.</p>

If global carbon emissions continue to rise at the current rate, the analysis indicated, the region's average temperature will rise 9 degrees F (5 degrees C) by 2100. But Dr. Lelieveld acknowledged some uncertainty in the emission trends as well as the climate models used to make the projection. "We cannot predict the future," he said. "We assume a scenario and project the outcome."

Extreme heat and humidity are a particularly dangerous combination. The bodies of humans exposed to high temperatures cool when sweat on the skin evaporates, but that process slows when the air holds lots of moisture. Outdoor work becomes nearly impossible when the wet-bulb temperature—a scale that measures heat and humidity as well as cloud cover and other meteorological conditions—reaches 90 degrees F (32 degrees C), according to [a 2020 study](#) by researchers at Purdue University.

Since 2005, the wet-bulb temperature in the Persian Gulf region has reached 95 degrees F (35 degrees C) nine times, according to a 2020 NASA study.

"When temperatures are getting close to the body temperature and the humidity is high, then the body cannot basically cool down," Dr. Lelieveld said. "The only way out for people is to get into air-conditioned buildings and structures."

For the analysis, the research team—including scientists from 11 nations—examined regional temperature records as far back as 1901 and analyzed previous research on climate data as reflected in tree rings and lake bed sediments dating back 2,000 years. They concluded that the region's dry soil and relative lack of tree cover—and its proximity to the humidity-boosting Red Sea and Persian Gulf—amplify the effects of rising levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Atmospheric greenhouse gases resulting from the burning of coal and other fossil fuels [are the principal cause of rising temperatures](#) globally, according to numerous scientific organizations, including the United Nations [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#). Carbon emissions in the region continue to rise, the analysis showed, and are on track to surpass emissions by Europe. Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt account for nearly three-quarters of the regional emission totals, according to the analysis.

Since the early 1900s, the global average temperature has risen about 1.8 degrees F (1.1 degrees C), according to the IPCC.

"There is high confidence in the human contribution to the observed increases of heat extremes in the broader region," the researchers said in their analysis. "In the past decades, extreme weather events' characteristics, including the frequency, duration and intensity of heat waves, have amplified across the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East."

The Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East region is one of several global hot spots where temperatures are rising faster than the global average. Others include Indonesia, southern Africa, the Amazon basin and the Arctic, which recent studies show is warming four times faster than the global average. But because the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East region is so populous, the researchers said, climate-related effects there could bring widespread societal disruption.

Climate change has been a factor in immigration from areas such as Syria, Iraq and northern Africa as drought and heat waves damage crops and send rural residents to cities, according to Marwa Daoudy, associate professor of international studies at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service.

"It's a combination of heat and the heat's impact on resources," Dr. Daoudy said of the situation in the region. "We are talking about drought and scarce water" that are making life more difficult.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Elusive future of San Francisco's fog
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/09/14/climate/san-francisco-fog.html

SAN FRANCISCO — It was the first morning of summer, the start of fog season. But the sky above the Golden Gate Bridge remained clear and blue.

Chris Dzierman, a bridge painter and foreman, looked to the west. Near the horizon, where water usually meets sky, a thick fog bank lurked. He wondered if and when it would roll in, as fog usually does on summer afternoons, smothering the bridge and beyond in wind and whiteness.

“It could last three minutes or three hours,” Mr. Dzierman said. “It’s fog. It’s got a mind of its own.”

Every summer, fog breathes life into the Bay Area. But people who pay attention to its finer points, from scientists to sailors, city residents to real estate agents, gardeners to bridge painters, debate whether there is less fog than there used to be, as both science and general sentiment suggest.

The ecological, economic and social effects of fog are profound, perhaps no more than in Northern California. Changes would be life-altering. But understanding fog is one of science’s toughest tricks. Quantifying the changes and determining possible causes, including global warming, is climatology’s version of chasing ghosts.

That day on the bridge, computer models predicted the fog would push through the Golden Gate in an hour or two. Mr. Dzierman trusts his gut. He had a hunch it would stay away, defying the familiar summertime cycle.

Just then, a slight breeze, an invisible puff of chill, the kind you might get by opening the freezer door.

“Feel that?” he said, inhaling deeply. “Mother Nature’s air-conditioning. Yeah, that feels good.”

It was a tease.

The day remained gloriously sunny, unusually hot and fog-free, the kind of San Francisco summer’s day that some fear is becoming more frequent. The bridge’s five fog horns went unused, for now.

While coastal fog isn’t unique to the California coast, few places in the world are so deeply associated with the ethereal movements and cooling spritz of fog’s peek-a-boo routine. Fog pours through the Golden Gate and crawls up and down the wrinkled hills of the city and the nearby coast. It cloaks and chills. Millions are affected by it, if only by the invisible cool breezes that presage the fog’s arrival.

Fog is why one neighborhood is notoriously chilly, another is surprisingly sunny, and the airport is where it is. It is why realtors talk about neighborhood fog patterns as much as square footage and schools. It is why fewer than half of Bay Area residents have air-conditioning, and partly why they use less water than most Americans.

Summer fog is why the mighty coastal redwoods grow where they do, surviving California’s dry season thanks to refreshing gulps of cold, wet air. It is why, until recently, few people worried about wildfires along the coast.

In June, July and August, as most of the Northern Hemisphere, and most of California, feels the full force of summer heat, the average daily high in San Francisco is below 70 degrees Fahrenheit, or about 21 Celsius, coolest of any major city in the continental United States.

Fog is a companion, part of the rhythm of summertime, flitting in and out of lives like a family member. But it does more than astonish ill-prepared tourists and dazzle photographers and poets. It nourishes the natural world. It enriches the area’s cultural identity. It might even be an untapped resource in California’s growing anxiety over water.

Which is why a decrease in California’s coastal fog, or the prospect of it disappearing entirely one day, is not a sunny proposition, particularly in and around San Francisco Bay.

The general consensus among the small cadre of scientists who study coastal fog is that it is decreasing, not just in California, but around the world. However, the reasons aren't clear.

Fog may be the most difficult meteorological phenomena to capture, calculate and predict. Unlike temperature, precipitation, humidity or wind, there is no reliable gauge for it. There is not even a practical definition of it.

Most will say that fog is a cloud that touches the ground, which sounds simple enough. But fog is movement in three dimensions, dipping and rising, forming and disappearing.

Sometimes a thin layer hugs the water below the Golden Gate Bridge, blinding mariners. Sometimes it settles about 200 feet higher, blinding drivers. Sometimes it shrouds the top of the bridge's towers and the airspace above, blinding pilots. Sometimes it does it all. Which of those things is fog?

It arrives like a whisper and disappears like a magic trick. It is there one moment and gone the next.

Early on a late-spring morning, Peter Weiss, a scientist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and three of his students, calling themselves "the fog squad," were erecting fog catchers.

The idea, simpler than the execution, is to harvest water from passing fog. A fog catcher is a stretched piece of mesh that, when it works, becomes saturated by fog moisture, dripping into a gutter, leading to a cistern.

The idea is not new. Fog from the ocean is a dependable feature in several places around the globe, mostly on the west coasts of major continents. Villages in places like Peru and Chile, sometimes with almost no rain throughout the year, have for centuries sustained themselves largely on fog water. Its use is growing in places like Morocco.

The question in a changing climate is whether fog water is a viable resource, if not a solution, for populated places expecting a drier future. Places like California.

"I would tend to think of it as a small drop in the bucket," said Dan Fernandez, a professor in the Department of Applied Environmental Science at California State University, Monterey Bay, and a leading researcher in fog-catching. "But we need a lot of small drops in the bucket to deal with what we have coming."

The idea of catching fog comes from nature. It is how the tallest trees in the world, California's coastal redwoods, survive.

Decades ago, Todd Dawson stumbled into the uncrowded world of fog research. Traipsing among the redwoods as an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, he wondered why they were habitually moist, and the ground around them so soggy, even mossy, even in mid-summer, California's dry season, when rain is rare.

Fog, obviously. But little had been done to quantify fog's importance to California's ecosystems.

"That kind of haunted me," he said.

Years later, as a professor of integrative biology at the University of California, Berkeley, Dr. Dawson studied redwoods and concluded that 30 to 40 percent of their annual moisture arrives in the form of fog.

The high canopies of redwoods are giant filters for drifting fog. The trees get drenched and nourished; water drips to the forest floor. There it sustains other plants and helps keep stream beds from drying, aiding species from lichens to ferns, newts to salmon.

“Fog is a big water subsidy,” Dr. Dawson said. “And I said, ‘My goodness, we’re ignoring this. We’ve been missing a big part of the hydrologic budget of the redwood forest.’”

In 2010, Dr. Dawson and a graduate student, James Johnstone, published another study with an attention-grabbing conclusion: Using observational data at airports in the coastal redwood region — from central California to its northern border, including the Bay Area — they found that the frequency of fog, measured by fog hours per day, had dropped 33 percent since the middle of the 20th century.

Fog was disappearing.

The ramifications extend far beyond a single species of tree. Does the long-term survival of redwoods and their ecosystems depend on fog? (Probably.) What about fog-cooled agricultural areas, like the Salinas Valley to the south of the Bay Area, or the grape-growing Napa Valley to the north? (Shifts in fog would affect them, surely.)

From a more human standpoint, what would happen to water use, power grids, solar farms and wind turbines? How would the future migrations of human populations be affected? And would San Francisco be, well, San Francisco without fog?

“Less fog is a game changer for a lot of things,” Dr. Dawson said.

For fog catchers, ambitions are realistic, motivations are simple: Why not try to squeeze water from air, especially in dry, dire times like these?

Instead of building fake redwoods, researchers build fog catchers. Results are highly variable — by day, by location, by type of mesh, by the fickle gods of fog.

The most that Dr. Fernandez has collected from a single catcher, made of one square meter of special mesh, was 37 liters of water in a day. Any location that dependably captures an average of more than a liter a day during the summer, he said, might be worth expanding.

“Fog is great,” Dr. Fernandez said. “It’s not rain. But it’s something.”

Dr. Weiss, a friend of Dr. Fernandez’s and a fellow researcher in nearby Santa Cruz, received a grant to study larger collection systems, beginning this summer. On the university’s hillside farm overlooking the Pacific, Dr. Weiss and his students created mockups using wood, mesh and guy wires. Sturdiness is vital; fog is wind, and the bigger the catcher, the more it acts like a sail.

The mesh, a bit like a weed fabric or a furnace filter, is specifically designed to capture fog. But researchers concoct variations. What works in a lab does not always work in nature.

Maybe fog will never be enough to quench the thirst of city dwellers and all their drinking, flushing and washing. But could a farm that gets zero rain in the summer, and uses no outside irrigation, survive on fog? Maybe, depending on the crop and the fickleness of the area’s fog.

“You could translate it from square meters of mesh to food calories, something like that,” Dr. Weiss said.

In 2016 and 2018, a Bay Area distillery called Hangar One produced small batches of Fog Point vodka, made from fog water. Bottles sold for up to \$100 each. But Dr. Fernandez and Dr. Weiss want to believe that fog water can be more than a gimmick. If it can nourish redwood trees for thousands of years, maybe it can help humans in coming decades.

Someday, they say, the foggy parts of California might be covered in fog farms, not unlike the solar farms found in sunnier spots. That depends on many factors, not least the future existence of fog.

Ask a scientist to explain why the California coast experiences fog in the summer, and the answer will come in paragraphs, not mere words.

“It’s fascinating to study, because sometimes fog feels very local,” said Rachel Clemesha, who studies coastal clouds as a project scientist at Scripps Institute of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego. “You’re in the fog here, but you see that it’s sunny over there. But it’s also tied to global climate.”

Fog is a niche of science, and the field of study is not a crowded one. One reason is the elusive nature of fog itself. Another is that it affects relatively few geographic areas, each differently.

But the biggest might be that it crosses so many disciplines, from sea to land to air — oceanography, meteorology, geography, biology and chemistry among them. Research is fractured.

Consider that Dr. Dawson is a plant scientist, and his monumental conclusions that fog is on the decline came from studies of redwoods.

For something so seemingly transient and capricious, California’s coastal fog is the result of sprawling atmospheric and oceanic phenomena, a delicate balance of powerful forces. What millions experience on land has its origins far out at sea.

Every summer, a high-pressure system, the North Pacific High, parks itself off the California coast, altering wind patterns and churning up the cold-water California Current that hugs the coast. The rest is all saturation points and dew points: Water vapor rises from the sea, turning into droplets that cling to microscopic airborne particles, like sea-salt aerosols, to form clouds. But these clouds stay low to the ocean, held there by a temperature inversion that creates a “marine layer.”

Sometimes this marine layer is low enough to be considered fog.

“Fog is so complex,” said Alicia Torregrosa, an environmental scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey who has done deep studies on California’s coastal fog. “And the complexity has to do with thermal relationships.”

The start, really, is the North Pacific High. Dr. Weiss calls it “the birth of fog.”

As the world warms, however, this balance could be at risk, with unpredictable consequences.

“What I want to know is, do we expect more or less clouds with climate change,” Dr. Clemesha said. “I still don’t know enough to say confidently. It’s complicated.”

Otto Klemm, a professor of climatology at the University of Münster in Germany, is more certain. He has studied data from airports all over the world.

“Fog has decreased, more or less everywhere,” he said, attributing the link both to climate change and to lower levels of air pollution, as water droplets have fewer particulates to cling to. “Of about 1,000 stations, 600 or 700 show a statistically significant decrease. All over Europe, all over North America, South America — everywhere.”

But back to California, and the fog along the coast.

“We know that the planet is warming, we know that oceans are getting warmer,” said Travis O’Brien, an assistant professor of earth and atmospheric sciences at Indiana University who has studied the California coast extensively. “What we don’t know is what’s happening in the really near coastal environment. In particular, ocean temperatures right along the coasts are a big question mark, and they have long been thought to be really important for coastal fog.”

Research can be contradictory or counterintuitive. A 2017 study using observational records of ships off the California coast suggests that fog is heavier than it used to be. So maybe it's just not coming onshore the way it once was.

In Southern California, during the periods colloquially called "May Gray" and "June Gloom," research shows an increase in cloud-base height — low clouds persist, but are now less likely to be in the form of ground-touching fog — because of the urban heat-island effect. Some experts surmise something similar is happening in San Francisco, too.

And maybe fog has made a comeback. Dr. O'Brien updated data from area airport observations and found that the declining fog levels in the second half of the 20th century have appeared to stabilize. Other researchers, using satellite technology, concluded this month "that the number of foggy days fluctuates considerably year-to-year with no discernible positive or negative trend occurring between 2000 and 2020."

No one is quite sure why that is.

True to form and character, fog varies from day to day, minute to minute, place to place. To say that fog is increasing or decreasing depends on so many variables. Is this valley, this hill, this beach, this city as foggy as it used to be? How can you really tell?

There may be no place with a deeper connection to fog than the California coast, especially the 150 miles or so from Monterey to Point Reyes National Seashore, where the lighthouse, shrouded in fog about 200 days a year, is one of the foggiest places on the continent.

Millions live within 50 miles of the coast along that stretch. Daily high temperatures might fall short of 60 degrees near the ocean but be more than 100 degrees inland, all depending on fog's reach.

In between, many feel the effect of fog but rarely see it — a breath of cool afternoon air, maybe, or a bracing chilled wind that upends outdoor plans in the evening.

Dr. Clemesha stands against a wooden wall wearing a pink sweater with orange lining, with a grill of shadows cast over her.

But in some places, the fog puts on a show.

It clings close to the ground, like a stalking cat. Sometimes it pauses, sometimes it pounces. It slips through topographic gaps. It peeks over the top of hillsides and slinks into valleys. Sometimes it comes in wisps. Sometimes in waves.

Sometimes the fog reaches one valley, one town, one neighborhood — but not the next. Sometimes it smothers everything in its path. "There's rarely a July Fourth fireworks celebration that anybody actually sees," said Phil Ginsburg, general manager of San Francisco Recreation and Park Department.

Some locals love the fog. Some hate it. All deal with it. Fog is such a part of the landscape that it even has a name: Karl, personified through a wry, anonymous Twitter account.

"This is my town," it responded to a follower recently. "You're just living in it."

Alexander Clark has been selling real estate in San Francisco for 20 years.

"Literally every single property I sell, the topic of fog comes up," he said.

San Francisco is not a big city, roughly seven miles by seven miles, containing about 870,000 residents. Surrounded on three sides by water, it is the fingernail on a thumb-shaped peninsula.

The city is pinched by hills, from Mount Davidson and Twin Peaks near the geographic center, to aristocratic Nob Hill and Telegraph Hill in the northeast corner. Beyond providing San Francisco its steep streets with clattering cable cars, the hills create both a divide and a maze for the wind and fog coming from the ocean.

It creates microclimates, maybe nanoclimates. Mr. Clark was at a friend's house on 48th Avenue, near the beach, on a summer day. "We wore down coats in the front of his house," he said. "And you go in the backyard and kids are doing Slip 'N Slide."

A decade ago, Mr. Clark drew up a simple fog and wind city map for his real estate blog to give potential buyers a basic sense of neighborhood patterns. "People know the Sunset, Richmond, you're going to have fog," he said. "But where it really starts to play is in some of these areas where people aren't quite sure. They're like, 'Hey, so what's the fog situation? Where's the fog line? I want to buy in the sun.'"

To try to understand fog's effect on property values, he and a colleague crunched numbers. San Francisco's foggy neighborhoods tend to be slightly less expensive than the median prices, though there are exceptions, like the tony Sea Cliff neighborhood.

But because there are so many factors that make or break a neighborhood — transportation, restaurants, backyards or the lack of them — proving that people pay less to live in foggier parts of town is difficult. So it comes down to feelings.

"Some people come out to an open house and there'll be fog, or the fog will just be rolling in, and they'll say, 'Yeah, we're out,'" Mr. Clark said. "I'll say, 'That's fine. You're not the right buyer.'"

Few people have spent more time living and working in the fog than Toby Kanzawa, a fourth-generation San Franciscan. Mr. Kanzawa works as a gardener at Golden Gate Park, for many years as a supervisor in Section 6 on the far west end, near the ocean.

He firmly believes there is less fog now.

"It's something we always talk about," he said. "We've noticed it out here."

Golden Gate Park stretches 3 miles from west to east, from the Pacific Ocean to the central part of San Francisco, near the famous Haight-Ashbury of hippie lore. There can be people bundled in down jackets and beanies at the west end, sunbathing on the east.

Signs of fog's influence are sprinkled around the park, even when the fog is nowhere to be seen. The Kwanzan cherry tree in front of the Japanese Tea Garden is twisted and tilted from the wind and fog that whips from the west. The nearby azaleas, rhododendrons and magnolias sometimes emerge from foggy summer and bloom again in San Francisco's sunny fall.

"Some plants are fooled into thinking it's a second spring," said Steven Pitsenbarger, the gardener at the Japanese Tea Garden.

Elsewhere, the fog effect is seen in the natural grasslands, which turn brown in the rainless summers — except for telltale green rings around shrubs and trees. It is not just redwoods; plants of all sizes serve as fog catchers.

Much of Golden Gate Park is manicured grass, requiring hundreds of millions of gallons of irrigated water annually. While the city moves to recycled water and tries to improve the efficiency of its water use, a future with less fog and cloud cover could have huge implications. Fog season overlaps with the heat of summer, the time of year with the highest temperatures and highest evaporation rates.

Just as the gardeners see the silent signs of fog, some see signs of it dissipating. Mr. Kanzawa sees it in the once-empty, fog-soaked portions of the park now crowded with picnickers and sunbathers. On the

crowded sand of Ocean Beach and Baker Beach. In real-estate prices. In the westside roads that were dangerous, if not impassable, on summer nights in his memory.

“It would get super thick,” Mr. Kanzawa said. “And now that’s a rarity. I haven’t seen it like that in a long time.”

Mr. Clark, the real-estate agent, is not so sure about the decline. He just knows that fog is a hot topic with everyone who is moving, either to San Francisco or within it.

“I mean, I ask everybody,” Mr. Clark said, “What’s your opinion of fog?”

The United States Coast Guard station at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge takes part in more than 300 search-and-rescue missions in a typical year, many of them in the fog.

Petty Officer Second Class Omar Mercado has an unusual, sometimes blinded view of those missions, driving a 47-foot motor lifeboat.

“I hate the fog,” Petty Officer Mercado said. “At first I thought it was really interesting and pretty. But after going out in it five or 10 times, no, not anymore.”

The channel of the Golden Gate is narrow, precariously so for the large container ships, some more than a quarter-mile long, that move among the major ports in the Bay. The tide floods in or rushes out like a spigot turned on full. Waves just beyond the bridge can rise 10 feet or more. The bridge towers, rock outcroppings and the undulated coast create whirlpool-like eddies. The wind almost always whips through at 10 or 15 knots, often harder.

Then, you add fog.

Petty Officer Mercado and his three crewmates recalled one particularly frightening summer night. Visibility barely extended over the bow. The sailors, on high alert, could hear the fog horns coming from above, presumably from the Golden Gate Bridge.

Suddenly, a moving gray wall appeared through the moving gray of fog: a container ship. Disaster was averted by mere feet.

“As a driver, you can get disoriented really fast,” Petty Officer Mercado said. “If you make it here at this station, you can make it at any other.”

The area is littered with shipwrecks and sea tales, not all deep in the past. In 1971, in the middle of a foggy night, a pair of oil tankers, each owned by Standard Oil, collided under the bridge.

The disaster led to the Ports and Waterways Safety Act of 1972 and the Vessel Traffic Service, a sort of air traffic control for congested or tricky ports in the United States. In a dim, windowless room at a Coast Guard station on Yerba Buena Island in the center of San Francisco Bay, the traffic controllers sit in front of large screens at all hours.

Ship traffic that used to be tracked here with large paper maps and magnets on a wall is now done with digital screens and color-coded dots. Blue is a passenger ship or ferry. Yellow is a ship carrying petroleum or other chemicals.

There are more than 30 controllers on staff, most of them civilians with deep local knowledge. Becoming certified takes about a year, and Tom Boone trains them.

Is there anything good about fog?

“No,” Mr. Boone said, without hesitation.

Despite all the effort, accidents happen and fog is the reason. In 2007, in fog, a container ship struck the Bay Bridge connecting San Francisco and Oakland. In 2013 a tanker did the same thing.

Navigation is so tricky that the biggest ships are met miles offshore by bar pilots, local experts who climb aboard and temporarily take control. They must find their way through everything else on the water — smaller ships, sailboats, kayakers, even swimmers. And fog.

Mr. Boone, a Navy veteran who specialized in seamanship and navigation, has sailed around the world and seen plenty of fog-prone ports, from Houston to Hong Kong. “The fog here just seems thicker,” he said.

Back near the Golden Gate, at the Coast Guard station, sailors monitor fog by eye and experience. Stepping out the door, rushing out for another rescue mission, the north tower of the bridge feels close enough to touch.

Petty Officer Mercado appreciates the beauty, but sees mostly danger. He considers it foggy when he cannot see Alcatraz or the San Francisco skyline. It is bad fog — mission-altering, risk-adding, response-lengthening fog — when he cannot see the bridge.

Rescues run the gamut: swimmers in distress, sailboats in rough seas, motorboats disabled.

There are stories of the sailboat that collided with a container ship unseen in the fog. Of the motorboat that cut across the tow lines of a Coast Guard lifeboat pulling a disabled ship to safety.

Less fog, Petty Officer Mercado said, “would make our job easier.”

A view looking up at a foggy, dark blue sky as framed by the Golden Gate Bridge’s suspension wires, which as they rise are increasingly obscured by the fog.
From the Bridge, a Warning

The late San Francisco newspaper columnist Herb Caen had a lifelong love affair with the city’s fog.

“The miraculous thing about the annual summer miracle is that the miracle continues,” he wrote in 1993. “The countryside sizzles, the Midwest fries when it isn’t drowning, the Right Coast is in its ‘it ain’t the heat, it’s the humidity’ miseries, but in San Francisco we are cool, if not, at times, downright cold.”

Caen considered foghorns the music of the gods.

“The fog is on schedule, morning and night, billowing through the Golden Gate despite the indignant protests of the horns under the great bridge,” he added.

Far below the bridge’s deck, on a perch accessible by a tiny elevator, operating engineer Randy Rosenkild examined one of the five foghorns. They are shaped like trumpets. Two larger ones, 48 inches long, face in opposite directions near the base of the south tower. Three slightly smaller ones are tucked below the roadway near midspan.

The larger ones have a specific signal: two seconds on, 18 seconds off, over and over. The others burp something quite different: one second on, two seconds off, one second on, 36 seconds off, repeat.

The idea is that mariners blinded by fog can guide themselves between the distinct sounds.

Foghorns are turned on when the other side of the channel disappears in fog.

Their bellows can be heard more than two miles out to sea, and sometimes in nearby places like Sausalito and Berkeley. There is a chorus of other warnings, too, in the soup of fog. Large ships squawk foghorns of their own. Buoys in the water bleat.

Residents sometimes phone the bridge and ask why the foghorns are on at all. It's not foggy at their house, they say.

Mr. Rosenkild's job is to make sure the huge horns do their important work. Fall — reliably sunny, rarely foggy — is his favorite time to clamber to their hidden homes under the bridge. Summer is his least.

"If you've never walked into thick fog, it will literally take your breath away with the chill factor," Mr. Rosenkild said. "It's so cold."

There is little precision or pageantry to the use of the bridge's foghorns. When the electrician on duty notes that it is too foggy to see across the mile-wide channel of the Golden Gate, the foghorns are turned on with a click of a computer mouse.

Inside a room on the south end of the bridge, Del West, an electrical superintendent, decided it was time. He warned workers all over the bridge by walkie-talkie, warned them again, then once more.

The bellow of a foghorn can be deafening, or even more dangerous, to people nearby. "It can interrupt your heartbeat," Mr. Rosenkild said. It didn't sound like a joke.

Mr. West clicked an icon on the computer screen that read "fog horns." A moment later, bass tones bellowed from the belly of the bridge.

Del West, the bridge's electrical superintendent. "July and August, they're on a lot."

He logged the time into a book with a green canvas cover that read, "Records." Electricians leave notes from their shifts there, including the use of fog horns.

Fog researchers might want to see those records, but Mr. West said that most of the log books have been lost to time. No one thought of the importance of tracking fog through history.

Out on the bridge, about 40 full-time painters continued their endless work. Under the thump-thump-thump of passing cars overhead, Mr. Dzierman and his crew sandblasted, primed and painted. Last year they spread 2,590 gallons of International Orange paint around the bridge.

They do their work where the structure needs it most. And more often than not, it is the west side, because of the effect of the fog from the ocean — the wind, the salt, the moisture.

"The west side gets pounded," Mr. Dzierman said. "Pounded."

But he'd rather have fog than no fog.

"I'd miss it," Mr. Dzierman said. "It's part of the bridge, right? It's part of San Francisco. It's part of the Golden Gate."

The fog bank lurked on the horizon, a ghostly tease.

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HEADLINE	09/14 SeaTac warning: aggressive owl in park
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/officials-suggest-wearing-helmet-after-aggressive-owl-reported-seatac-park/PSMNVQNGYJFETIOUQ5PJETA7E/
GIST	SEATAC, Wash. — The city of SeaTac is warning people about a "very aggressive owl" at a park and offered some unique ways for people to protect themselves from the bird while in the area.

	<p>The owl was spotted at North SeaTac Park at the corner of Des Moines Memorial Drive South and South 128th Street.</p> <p>A sign posted at the park and tweeted by the city said parkgoers should use caution or avoid the area until the owl moves on.</p> <p>The sign also said, “If you must walk past a nest, wave your arms slowly overhead to keep the birds at a distance. Other protective actions include wearing a hat or helmet, or carrying an umbrella.”</p> <p>While the “protective actions” may seem like overkill, forestwildlife.org said wearing a hat or bike helmet is a good way to protect yourself from an owl’s sharp talons.</p> <p>The angry bird is likely a barred or great horned owl, the two most common types of owls in the area.</p> <p>Owls may become aggressive several times a year, particularly in the spring and fall.</p> <p>In the spring, the birds become territorial around their nests and young, according to Chase Gunnell with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.</p> <p>Gunnell said in the fall, the aggression usually comes from young owls who are learning the ropes of establishing their territory.</p> <p>Most aggressive owl incidents happen during the late night or early morning hours.</p> <p>Often, the owls will hoot repeatedly before attacking to warn people to stay out of their territory. Gunnell said people should take the hooting as a sign to move on.</p> <p>Though there have been incidents in the past where people have been scratched by an owl, attacks are generally rare, though owl aggression happens across North America.</p> <p>No owl injuries have been reported at the park.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	09/14 Online child sex abuse nets 141 arrests
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-09-14/operation-targeting-online-child-sex-abuse-arrests-southern-california
GIST	<p>Authorities arrested 141 people across Southern California — most of them on suspicion of possessing child sexual abuse material — as part of a weeklong operation targeting online abuse, officials said Wednesday.</p> <p>The effort was spearheaded by the long-running Los Angeles Regional Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, which comprises dozens of law enforcement agencies led by the LAPD. The results of the operation, which was conducted Sept. 6-12, were announced at a news conference outside Los Angeles police headquarters early Wednesday.</p> <p>LAPD Capt. Jeff Bratcher said many predators take advantage of the anonymity of the internet to target victims — for example, by infiltrating online gaming sites where they might try to convince a child to send images of themselves in exchange for virtual credits that can be used to make in-game purchases. The rise of esports and social media platforms in recent years has caused a surge in abuse reports, he said.</p>

“When we first started in 2004, we started LAPD’s ICAC because we received 458 tips that year. In 2019 that number rose to 8,500. In 2020, 2021, both years, were over 24,000. This year so far, we’re over 25,000, so we should end the year with over 36,000 cybertips,” he said in an interview after the news briefing. “And each one of these tips was one more potential child victim.”

Although parents are “so used to seeing digital devices in their kids’ hands,” he said, he encouraged them to more closely monitor their children’s internet activity.

“It’s not the same stranger in a van that your mom and dad and my mom and dad warned us about; it’s a whole different type of threat,” he said. “And they never really know who they’re talking to.”

Among those arrested, the majority were wanted on suspicion of possessing, distributing or manufacturing child sexual abuse material, authorities said. An additional 18 people were booked for parole or probation violations, six were wanted for sexual abuse of a minor, and two each for the charges of statutory rape and pimping. Three people were arrested on suspicion of causing a domestic disturbance.

Investigators pursued new leads while also targeting people who had previously been arrested, Bratcher said.

These included a San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputy and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center pediatrician charged with possessing more than 600 sexually explicit images of children, he said.

The pediatrician, Dr. Gary Goulin, was fired from the hospital sometime after his arrest last November by the LAPD’s Juvenile Division and has been ordered not to practice medicine while the case against him is pending, according to the City News Service. He has since pleaded not guilty to possession of child or youth pornography, the wire service reported.

Task force members also conducted compliance checks on people required to register as sex offenders for various offenses.

The outbreak of the pandemic brought an alarming [surge in child sex abuse reports](#), officials said, as stay-at-home orders meant to slow the virus’ spread led to schools closing, youth activities being cancelled and kids spending more time online.

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HEADLINE	09/14 Mounting threats to poll workers
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/election-chief-on-mounting-threats-to-election-officials-ahead-of-midterms/
GIST	<p>The nation’s top election security official broke down as she recounted the vitriol targeting election officials, including those in her home state of Washington. "It's unnerving," said Kim Wyman, now the senior election lead at the nation's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).</p> <p>"Threats like 'we're going to hang you.' And 'I hope somebody puts a bullet in your head,'" Wyman told CBS News in her first TV interview since accepting her new role.</p> <p>Less than 60 days before the midterm elections, officials are bracing for a range of potential physical security risks prompted by conspiracy-laden claims of voter fraud, the Capitol insurrection and violent rhetoric spreading beyond an outspoken fringe of election deniers into mainstream politics.</p> <p>Six years ago, threats to election security were dominated by malicious cyber activity of foreign adversaries, like Russia. Now, the U.S. must turn inward to confront concerns about "insider threats" and an uptick in harassment, intimidation, and threats of physical violence directed at poll workers nationwide.</p> <p>"The cybersecurity threats have not gone away," said Ben Hovland, Commissioner for the Election Assistance Commission (EAC). "But now there are personal threats, harassment, intimidating calls and emails, and the weaponization of information requests, reaching across the country."</p>

"What is concerning to me nowadays is the prospect of insider threats," said Natalie Adona, incoming clerk recorder-elect for Nevada County, California. "People who are signing up for the specific purpose of attempting to mess things up."

Insider threats

While U.S. officials are not currently aware of any "specific or credible" threats imminent to the 2022 elections, unofficial election audits spanning several states, warrants to seize voting equipment and the indictment of Tina Peters, Colorado's Mesa County clerk — for facilitating a security breach of her own county's election system — have intensified worries.

"People who go for these jobs — as elected officials or poll workers — have they bought into this stolen election lie? Now we have to worry about them coming in and attempting to be an insider threat," said Matt Crane, executive director of the Colorado County Clerks Association. "That increases the likelihood of another Tina Peters."

"We have seen a nationwide effort to recruit and train election deniers as poll workers," said Rachel Orey, associate director of elections at the Bipartisan Policy Center, citing groups like "True the Vote," "The Election Integrity Network," and "U.S. Election Integrity Plan." The latter [has been sued by civil rights groups](#) who claim members have violated the Ku Klux Klan Act by sending armed "agents" to interrogate voters in a door-to-door voter intimidation campaign. Attorneys for the group deny the allegations.

"Some of the threats we've seen — I have never seen them in all of my years of doing elections," said Wyman, a 30-year veteran of elections.

In September 2021, that unease drove CISA to release its first ["insider threats" guide](#), a 10-page playbook designed to help state and local election officials spot rogue activity among election workers, temporary or seasonal staff, volunteers, vendors and contractors.

Wyman says that while municipalities have dealt with insider threats "long before the 2020 election," CISA has redoubled its efforts "to remind them that insider threats can come on many different levels."

The information war still poses "biggest challenge" to election officials

After Washington State commissioners in at least three counties nixed ["Albert sensors" — a cybersecurity tool designed to alert local governments about potential hacking attempts](#) — Wyman immediately called the election officials in her native state.

"I talked them through why we have the sensors," Wyman said. "If we see an IP address in a foreign nation that's hitting every single election office that has an Albert sensor, that's an indicator that that's a threat actor trying to get into those systems. And we can alert those election officials to be able to secure their systems."

Winning the information war remains "the biggest challenge" to election officials, today, according to Wyman.

A majority of Americans think there was either no voter fraud in the 2020 election or that it was limited to a few isolated incidents, [according to a CBS News/YouGov poll](#) last month. But this is not true of Republicans: six in 10 continue to believe there was widespread fraud and irregularities in 2020.

Public officials like Joseph Kirk say renewed skepticism offers an "opportunity to educate" voters. The election supervisor who has overseen contests in Bartow County, Georgia, for 15 years is drafting a "code of conduct" for poll workers to clarify policies and processes in place to address violations of state or federal law.

After California recall proponents pushed their way into county offices in Nevada County to film election workers in late 2021, election officials installed four cameras to offer public livestreams of ballot processing.

In Arizona's bellwether, Maricopa County, public officials were chased to their cars by droves of election deniers — some armed — in the aftermath of the 2020 election. Now, they offer 2-3 tours of their election facility every week.

Bulletproof glass, magnetometers and fencing

Election officials in Maricopa County have installed perimeter fencing, tinted glass windows and a private security to its tabulation center following the crush of violent threats that accompanied [an unofficial election audit peddling "the big lie."](#) County Police Sheriff Paul Penzone has suspended personal time off for police officers during the week of the election to ensure sufficient staffing.

Philadelphia's new election warehouse and ballot processing center is fortified with bulletproof glass, magnetometer-lined entrances and gated security. The upgrades follow the [arrests of two heavily armed Virginia men](#) outside the Pennsylvania Convention Center in November 2020. While mail-in ballots were being counted inside, authorities found two loaded semi-automatic Beretta pistols, one semi-automatic AR-15-style rifle, and ammunition in their vehicle, a silver Hummer truck adorned with Q-Anon stickers.

Some election officials worry that election facilities located in buildings repurposed to be polling places may fall short of security demands.

"My office is an old state patrol barracks," Kirk told CBS News. "This is not a building that was designed to be a very secure building. My polling places – community buildings – are located in places where security was not the first thing in mind. I'm not sure how to temporarily secure those spaces in a way that allows folks to still feel welcome."

CISA has assembled a [resource pamphlet](#) geared toward helping election officials access resources to secure voting locations and election facilities, and the agency has hired more than 150 physical security specialists to date who regularly screen public buildings – including election offices and polling sites – for vulnerabilities.

"The only problem with these assessments is that some of our small and medium sized counties don't have the budget to implement all of the recommendations," Crane said. "That's why we've tried to push the federal and state government for increased funding for election security."

Cost of better security

The Brennan Center for Justice, a non-partisan policy institute, [estimates that approximately \\$300 million](#) is needed for key measures to keep election offices and workers physically secure over the next five years.

"The demands and costs that are being applied to election officials are only going up," said David Becker, executive director and founder of the Center for Election Innovation and Research. "There is new state legislation that requires things like training of poll watchers, 24/7 surveillance of drop boxes, etc., and all that costs money and requires staff. We haven't invested nearly enough. The last investment from the federal government for elections was \$75 million in the last budget. That is literally one quarter for [every] eligible voter in the United States."

Justice Department officials who have appeared before Congress have pointed to the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program for available funds, but a department spokesperson told CBS News that as of the last reporting period — June 30, 2022 — the Justice Department had not allocated a single dollar to election security.

More than a year after Attorney General Merrick Garland established the federal Election Threats Task Force to investigate threats to election and poll workers, the unit has faced scrutiny for producing just one conviction and a handful of charges. Last month, [the department reported](#) more than 1,000 probes of harassing and threatening messages directed at election workers.

"I'm one of the few cases that has been charged by the FBI," Stephen Richer said of the threat against him. In August, a Missouri man [was indicted for leaving a voicemail threatening to kill the Maricopa County Recorder](#) warning that "other people from other states are watching your a**." Richer says he's reported a slew of additional threats against his colleagues online — including on LinkedIn.

"We need more consequences for bad behavior," Adona told CBS News. The California official also believes law enforcement guidance on reporting threats has been too vague. She noted that federal law enforcement has urged officials to share every "problematic" incident, leaving officials guessing as to what meets the reporting threshold.

"It feels like the people who do the harassing, intimidating and threatening by and large are able to get away from it," she added. "I don't think that bodes well for my profession in the long run."

Denial of services attack

Election deniers have bombarded municipal offices with a coordinated campaign of 2020 voting records requests, prompting some municipalities to dedicate staff members to field such inquiries amid a crunch of midterms preparations.

According to election officials, the latest barrage of public records followed a live-streamed "Moment of Truth" summit in late August organized and livestreamed by MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell who urged followers to request "cast vote records" – spreadsheets generated by voting machines -- from election offices across the country.

"One of the things we're seeing frequently now is election officials are overwhelmed with duplicative and frivolous public records requests," said Becker. "They're being harassed by them. Those requests suck up the bandwidth of election offices when they are supposed to be focused on running the next election."

Many of the public records templates circulated by advocates of "the big lie" include false deadlines claiming that state election data will be deleted imminently. In one such email shared with CBS News, a woman identified as Phyllis Minkus, wrote on Aug. 25: "We need to bombard the AZ Recorder's Office with email/submission requests for the Nov 3 election information...ALL Arizona election data will be destroyed Sept 1! You must get this done before that date."

Maricopa County officials received 369 public records requests in 2021. So far this year, that number has already more than doubled to 819.

"When you're spending a considerable time responding to uninformed records requests derived from internet conspiracies, that time is not being spent on the administration of our elections," Hovland, said. "There's no question that this is a denial of services attack," said Crane, referencing a cybersecurity tactic used to overwhelm victims with trafficked communications. "They are trying to create chaos and confusion with these open records requests."

Poll workers wanted

A combination of early retirements and hastened turnover among election officials and poll workers has compounded the resource crunch in election offices.

In Nevada County, with about 102,000 people, Adona estimates a third of poll workers didn't return after the 2020 election – around three times as many as in previous election cycles.

"What I worry about in the long run from that is the impact that has on the institutional knowledge that is leaving with those people," Wyman said.

Last month, misinformation-fueled threats also prompted all three election officials in Gillespie County, Texas, to abruptly resign.

	<p>In Arizona, three of the state's 15 county recorders – officials in Yavapai, Pinal and Yuma counties – have left their posts in the past 90 days.</p> <p>"A lot of the counties that are suffering the most are red counties," said Becker. "They're smaller counties. In terms of population, they have fewer resources. And when election officials in some of these counties go home at night, their family, friends, and neighbors often think they stole the election."</p> <p>Philadelphia is trying to aid election staff recruiting with substantial pay increases, boosting base pay from \$120 to \$200 per day, this month. The compensation hike will also offer workers another \$50 for pre-election training.</p> <p>Amid a new wave of skepticism among voters supporting former President Trump, many election officials have also urged those harboring doubts about U.S. election systems to volunteer – a two-pronged push to debunk misinformation at the source and bolster election worker numbers.</p> <p>"I often recommend to people who are skeptical: be a poll worker," Hovland recounted. "Get in the door and see the safeguards, checks and bipartisan teams. See the 'chain of custody' procedures. Historically, that gives people a lot of confidence."</p> <p>"A lot of clerks are actually inviting folks who have concerns about the elections to come in and serve as poll workers so they can learn the process," Crane said. "The key is to learn the truth from the experts, not the lie from the grifters."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Russia spies turn to industrial espionage?
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/fears-grow-of-russian-spies-turning-to-industrial-espionage/
GIST	<p>Russia acknowledged this week that parts of its technology industry are dependent on foreign knowledge and lagging competitors by more than a decade, raising concerns that the country's cyber spies will be used for industrial espionage.</p> <p>Experts told The Record that Western companies should be on "full alert" for attacks from Moscow's intelligence services. President Vladimir Putin has suggested in recent months that the country's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) should support technological development as the country deals with mounting sanctions.</p> <p>The admission about the state of Russia's microelectronics industry is contained in a new strategic policy document from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, reported Tuesday by Kommersant. It lists a number of acute problems facing Russia's domestic technology industry, including its dependence on foreign intellectual property; its lack of production capacity; and Russia being unattractive to investors.</p> <p>These headwinds were referenced in a speech by Putin to the SVR on June 30 when he stressed the role of the spy agency in mitigating sanctions, while avoiding any direct reference to the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>"As always, one priority area of the SVR's work is its support of the industrial and technological development of our country; the strengthening of our defense potential. This effort is always acute, particularly now amidst attempts to apply sanctions pressure on Russia," Putin said in June.</p> <p>"In that regard, we all know well that the Soviet Union, and even before it, the country always lived under the conditions of such sanctions. One way or another, they have always tried to contain us," he added.</p> <p>Keir Giles, a senior consulting fellow at Chatham House's Russia and Eurasia Programme, told The Record he would be "startled, alarmed and dismayed" if Western companies "were not already fully on alert" for such espionage.</p>

“I think it’s another of those ones where we’ve forgotten just how busy the Russian intelligence services always were during Soviet times doing precisely this, trying to steal technological secrets from the West because they were unable to develop things themselves,” Giles added.

Gavin Wilde, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former director for Russia at the U.S. National Security Council, provided the translation of Putin’s comments for The Record and said: “Left unstated in this allusion to a bygone era is that in many ways, Moscow is more economically and politically isolated than ever.”

“As in so many other things, it’s Russia reverting to long-standing practice — if of course they had ever abandoned it. I would be surprised if that had ever been de-prioritised in the Russian intelligence services,” said Giles, the author of a forthcoming book titled Russia’s War on Everybody due to be published in November.

“It could just be a factor of they’re actually mentioning it now, which is different than us noticing it more now along with everything else that Russia has always been doing, but is now more of a focus of attention.”

Difficulties at the SVR

Putin’s speech was delivered at the SVR headquarters in Moscow as part of commemorations for the centennial of its “illegals” program, which deploys undeclared intelligence officers abroad living under false identities.

In a major upset for the agency, ten of these spies — including Anna Chapman — were arrested in 2010 by the FBI. Another suspected member of that spy ring — who was deported for immigration violations without being charged with espionage — worked as a software tester for Microsoft.

It is not known whether this man had intended to spy on Microsoft itself or if his employment at the company was part of his cover. A federal law enforcement official [told The Washington Post](#) that he “was just in the early stages... had just set up shop” at the time the group was rolled up.

Further setbacks to the SVR’s human operations include the more recent shutting of Russia’s consulates in Seattle and San Francisco in response to the country’s interference in the 2016 presidential election and the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in the UK.

“In general I’d wager the San Francisco and Seattle consulates were prime locations for collection on tech companies, so their closure was probably a hit to Moscow’s level of insight,” said Wilde. “The raft of recent expulsions and exposures have made the environment for SVR human operations less and less permissive, likely lending impetus to SVR’s cyber-enabled espionage.”

Despite the impact on its in-person espionage, the SVR has been credited by Microsoft for pulling off “the most sophisticated nation-state [cyber] attack in history” through [the SolarWinds supply-chain breach](#) in 2020.

The Russian spy agency has traditionally focused on government departments, NGOs and think-tanks as its intelligence targets — in contrast to hackers allegedly working on behalf of the Chinese government who have been accused of stealing commercially viable intellectual property from U.S. businesses.

However it is not clear whether Russia could effectively use the stolen IP to meet the challenges described in the Kommersant report.

Carnegie’s Wilde said that regardless of whether the SVR deployed cyber or human resources, Russia’s ability to turn its intelligence into something valuable had “certainly diminished relative to the glory days of the KGB”.

Despite Putin’s speech, the SVR’s cyber espionage group — tracked as Nobelium by Microsoft and APT29 by Mandiant — does not appear to have changed from targeting victims who offer political and foreign policy insights.

As recently as last month, Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) [said that Nobelium](#) “remains highly active” but was targeting government organizations alongside NGOs and IGOs across the U.S., Europe and Central Asia.

Mandiant, now part of Google Cloud, told The Record that it had “observed fewer intrusions of U.S.-based organizations by APT29 in 2022 compared to prior years.”

“They have been deliberate in their targeting and have continued multi-year attacks of specific organizations with data of interest to the Russian government,” Charles Carmakal, the company’s senior vice president and chief technical officer, told The Record.

“They continue to develop and leverage novel tradecraft that makes it very difficult for network defenders to detect when they penetrate victim environments.”

Wilde told The Record that Putin’s speech was essentially a “warning” to the intelligence service against “wishful thinking” given the new geopolitical realities.

“His explicit charge, however, seems willfully ignorant of the insurmountable barriers to Russia’s technological self-sufficiency,” Wilde added. “Moscow now has essentially two options: illicitly pilfer the componentry and know-how it needs from abroad or deepen its [dependency](#) on exploitative and problematic ‘friends’ like China and Iran.

“Neither approach is really scalable to Moscow’s aspirations, and there isn’t really a third option.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 Human trafficking newest abuse
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2022/09/human-traffickings-newest-abuse-forcing-victims-into-cyberscamming/
GIST	<p>The ads on the Telegram messaging service’s White Shark Channel this summer had the matter-of-fact tone and clipped phrasing you might find on a Craigslist posting. But this Chinese-language forum, which had some 5,700 users, wasn’t selling used Pelotons or cleaning services. It was selling human beings—in particular, human beings in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, and other cities in southeast Asia.</p> <p>“Selling a Chinese man in Sihanoukville just smuggled from China. 22 years old with ID card, typing very slow,” one ad read, listing \$10,000 as the price. Another began: “Cambodia, Sihanoukville, six Bangladeshis, can type and speak English.” Like handbills in the days of American slavery, the channel also included offers of bounties for people who had run away. (After an inquiry from ProPublica, Telegram closed the White Shark Channel for “distributing the private information of individuals without consent.” But similar forums still operate freely.)</p> <p>Fan, a 22-year-old from China who was taken captive in 2021, was sold twice within the past year, he said. He doesn’t know if he was listed on Telegram. All he knows is that each time he was sold, his new captors raised the amount he’d have to pay to buy his freedom. In that way, his debt more than doubled from \$7,000 to \$15,500 in a country where the annual per capita income is about \$1,600.</p> <p>Fan’s descent into forced labor began, as human trafficking often does, with what seemed like a bona fide opportunity. He had been a prep cook at his sister’s restaurant in China’s Fujian province until it closed, then he delivered meals for an app-based service. In March 2021, Fan was offered a marketing position with what purported to be a well-known food delivery company in Cambodia. The proposed salary, \$1,000 a month, was enticing by local standards, and the company offered to fly him in. Fan was so excited that he told his older brother, who already worked in Cambodia, about the opportunity. Fan’s brother quit his</p>

job and joined him. By the time they realized the offer was a sham, it was too late. Their new bosses wouldn't let them leave the compound where they had been put to work.

Unlike the countless people trafficked before them who were forced to perform sex work or labor for commercial shrimping operations, the two brothers ended up in a new occupation for trafficking victims: playing roles in financial scams that have swindled people across the globe, including in the United States.

Tens of thousands of people from China, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam and elsewhere in the region have been similarly tricked. Phony job ads lure them into working in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, where Chinese criminal syndicates have set up cyberfraud operations, according to interviews with human rights advocates, law enforcement personnel, rescuers and a dozen victims of this new form of human trafficking. The victims are then coerced into defrauding people all around the world. If they resist, they face beatings, food deprivation or electric shocks. Some jump from balconies to escape. Others accept their lot and become paid participants in cybercrime.

Fan and his brother eventually ended up in Sihanoukville in a compound surrounded by a barbed wire fence. They were made to lure people in Germany into depositing funds with a [phony online brokerage](#) controlled by their operation, which also targeted English speakers in Australia and elsewhere.

"This idea of combining two crimes, scamming and human trafficking, is a very new phenomenon," said Matt Friedman, chief executive of the Mekong Club, a Hong Kong-based nonprofit that combats what it calls modern slavery. Calling it a "double hurt," Friedman said it's unlike anything he's ever seen in his 35-year career. The phenomenon has only just begun to come to light in the US, including in a [Vice article](#) published in July.

The most widely used technique among these operations is known as pig butchering, an allusion to the practice of fattening up a hog before slaughtering it. The approach combines some time-tested elements of fraud—such as gaining trust, in the manner of a Ponzi scheme, by making it easy for marks to extract cash at first—with elements unique to the Internet era. It relies on the effectiveness of relationships nurtured on social media and the ease with which currencies can be moved electronically.

Typically, fraudsters ingratiate themselves into online friendships or romantic relationships and then manipulate their targets into depositing larger and larger sums in investment platforms that are controlled by the fraudsters. Once the targets can't or won't deposit more, they lose access to their original funds. They're then informed that the only way to retrieve their cash is by depositing even more money or paying a hefty fee. Needless to say, any additional funds disappear in similar fashion.

Some Americans have lost huge sums. An entrepreneur in California said she was swindled out of \$2 million and unwittingly facilitated an additional \$1 million in losses by convincing her friends to join her in what seemed like a surefire investment. A hospital technician in Houston enticed her friends and colleagues to join her in a similar scheme, costing the group \$110,000. An accountant in Connecticut is no longer preparing for retirement after watching \$180,000 vanish in two separate swindles. They were among more than two dozen scam victims from seven countries interviewed by ProPublica.

Out of fear or shame, [most pig butchering victims do not report their losses](#). That's one reason that the limited data available likely understates the scale of the damage. According to the Global Anti-Scam Organization, a nonprofit founded last year to combat the new form of fraud, at least 1,838 people in 46 countries have lost an average of about \$169,000 each to pig butchering since June 2021. Many still seem stunned by the effectiveness of the trickery. "I have to say, it's brilliant," said a Silicon Valley CEO who tallied her loss at \$800,000 and asked not to be named out of embarrassment. For many victims, the betrayal by a seeming friend only compounds the devastation.

Fan's ordeal began with a burst of optimism. He flew to Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh—it was his first time leaving China—and then waited out two weeks of COVID-19 quarantine in a hotel. He was then driven to a walled-off condominium complex in the city to begin his training. It was only then, in April 2021, that he realized something was off. Instead of learning about food delivery or working in a kitchen,

he and his brother were placed in front of computers and told to study materials about how to defraud people online.

Fan, who is serious and reserved, with a crew cut and a round face that betrays little emotion, was able to document parts of his account, including the offer letter that drew him to Cambodia. (Fan is his family nickname; he asked that ProPublica not include his full name out of fear of his captors.) His experiences resembled those of other trafficking victims ProPublica interviewed and aligned with descriptions provided by experts and others.

Fan and his brother spent six months engaging in pig butchering schemes before their bosses decided to relocate the operation to Sihanoukville. The bosses presented them with a choice: They could pay the equivalent of \$7,000 each to leave, or they could move along with the company. The brothers, who were paid negligible wages for their work, couldn't afford the fee. So they relocated to Sihanoukville, in the upper floors of a hotel and casino called the White Sand Palace located in the center of the city.

The job could be terrifying. Fan said he witnessed a worker "half-beaten to death" by guards. "People were saying: 'Help him! Help him!'" he recalled. "But nobody went up to help him. Nobody dared to."

Only weeks after Fan and his brother arrived at White Sand, they experienced a brief moment of hope, Fan said. A person approached them and offered to get them out. With his help, they managed to leave—only to realize that the seeming savior had sold them to another criminal organization. This one was located in a fortified complex of beige dormitories on the edge of Sihanoukville with the grandiose name [Arc de Triomphe](#). The \$7,000 each owed for his freedom had risen to \$11,700. And the price would go higher still.

Cyberfraud operations in Asia, including the ones Fan worked for, are highly organized. Some have gone so far as to draft detailed, psychologically astute training materials on how to dupe strangers. ProPublica obtained more than 200 such documents from an activist who helps involuntary workers escape.

Step one in the fraud process for Fan and others was to create an attractive online persona. In his case, he was expected to pose as a woman when wooing targets online. His operation bought photos and videos from websites that cater to such operations. For example, bundles of hundreds of photos of good-looking women and men are available for less than the cost of a cup of coffee from a shop called [YouTaoTu](#). Another website [markets a "pig butchering scam" package](#): For the equivalent of \$12, it offers a "handsome guy set" of images of a man with perfectly chiseled abs. (Neither online store responded to requests for comment.) Such photos are frequently lifted from the online accounts of unsuspecting people; ProPublica found that images used by one fraudster were stolen from the Instagram profile of a [Chinese social media influencer](#).

Scamming guides obtained by ProPublica recommend using such photos to set up social media accounts and then bolster them with the simulacrum of an affluent lifestyle by posting photos of luxury cars, along with descriptions of relevant hobbies such as investing. Stressing your belief in the importance of family, one guide adds, is the sort of touch that helps foster trust.

The resulting profiles can seem so real that one Canadian man met his future scammer after Facebook's algorithm suggested the person to him as a friend. The chance encounter cost him and his friends nearly \$400,000, according to a police report he later filed. Other victims told ProPublica they met their scammers on LinkedIn, OkCupid, Tinder, Instagram or WhatsApp. (Meta, which owns Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, said it has "long prohibited this content" and is investing "significant resources" into blocking it. Match Group, owner of Tinder and OkCupid, said it's using machine learning and content moderators to fight fraud. LinkedIn didn't respond to emails seeking comment.)

The next step for Fan was to contact as many victims as possible. He recalled working on a team of eight under a group leader, who gave each of them 10 phones to make it easy to keep multiple chats going, along with lists of phone numbers to contact. Fan's job was to try to initiate conversations on WhatsApp.

He would do it by pretending he had reached a wrong number, a common ruse. Others would open with a simple “Hi.”

Some tiny percentage of people responded favorably. When they did, Fan’s job was to handle the crucial initial part of the conversation. That’s when scammers are instructed to get to know their victims and discover what one training guide calls “pain points” that can be exploited. It’s also an opportunity to do what another document calls “customer mapping,” screening potential marks to glean information on their wealth and their vulnerability to being “cut,” slang for convincing them to fall for the scheme.

Using WhatsApp offered other practical advantages. Initially, Fan said, his team was [aiming its efforts at Germans](#). Fan doesn’t speak a word of German, but it didn’t matter. All his chats were filtered through language translation software. Later, his team shifted to marks who spoke English. If any of the potential victims wanted to hear the voice of the attractive woman he was pretending to be, Fan said, there was a woman on staff who spoke fluent English and could record voice memos for him.

Because he was a rookie, Fan’s job was mostly limited to enticing marks to download an app called MetaTrader that would provide access to a brokerage where, he told his new “friends,” they could make fortunes trading cryptocurrencies. Fan would try to convince them to buy cryptocurrencies such as ethereum or bitcoin and deposit them in a brokerage controlled by the scam operation. The brokerage would then post phony numbers, including ones that represented supposed gains in their accounts.

If customers complied and began depositing significant sums, Fan said, he would typically hand the phone to his boss, who would take over and begin prospecting for a major strike. The strategy squares with what several scam victims told ProPublica: They sensed they were talking with multiple people. Indeed, they often were.

About 8,000 miles from Cambodia, an American who lives near San Francisco got a WhatsApp message on Oct. 7, 2021, from a stranger calling herself Jessica. She seemed to have reached him by mistake. Jessica asked the man, whose middle name is Yuen, if they knew each other; she said she had found his number on her phone and didn’t know why. Yuen responded that he didn’t know her. But Jessica was chatty and friendly, and her photo was alluring, so they kept talking.

Yuen agreed to tell his story on the condition that ProPublica identify him only by his middle name and omit certain details that could identify him. He saved his chat history with Jessica, which would run to 129,000 words over several months, and later shared it with ProPublica. (Yuen also [shared his chat history with Forbes](#).)

At the moment Jessica initiated contact, Yuen was vulnerable. His father was in a hospital, dying from a lung disease. He had entrusted Yuen, the youngest of four siblings, with the power to decide whether to cut off his life support. It would also be up to Yuen to plan his father’s funeral and distribute his estate.

The family had immigrated to the U.S. from Hong Kong decades earlier. Yuen, who is in his early 50s and works as an accountant for a major university, was more affluent than his siblings, who are all older than him. He felt it was his duty to take care of them in old age, much as he was caring for his father and had cared for his late mother. Jessica told him she admired his commitment to his family. She shared her own tale of having a grandfather in the hospital.

Jessica was, by all appearances, a savvy and talented woman. She claimed to be a Chinese immigrant herself, a private banker at J.P. Morgan Chase in New York City. (A Chase spokesperson said the bank has no current employee with her purported Chinese name, Wang Xinyi.) Jessica’s photographs showed her spending weekends on Long Island playing with her rich friend’s toddler. She seemed fashionable, loved shopping and found time for yoga nearly every day, and she would flirt with Yuen. When Jessica posted photos of herself at a luxurious beach property, he wrote, “Wish I was there now.” She replied, “We can go play together.”

One Monday in late October, Jessica told Yuen she had just made \$100,000 trading gold contracts. She let him in on a secret: She had a rich uncle in Hong Kong who had his own team of analysts who fed her inside quotes about where the price of gold would move. Every time “Uncle,” as she referred to him, called with news of where the market would go, she could make a guaranteed 10% profit by trading on his directions.

Jessica offered to teach Yuen—but only him. “Why just me?” he asked. Jessica said it was because she sympathized with Yuen about his dying father. “The money you earn can better help your father,” she explained. Plus, she knew she could trust him to keep her secret about insider trading. “Of course, I won’t tell anyone,” Yuen told Jessica as he pondered whether to join in.

The exchange marked a key moment in Yuen’s relationship with Jessica. The person behind Jessica’s alter ego was using a manipulation technique called “altercasting,” according to Martina Dove, a psychology researcher and author of [“The Psychology of Fraud, Persuasion and Scam Techniques,”](#) who reviewed Yuen’s chat log at ProPublica’s request. It puts the scammer in a position of trusting the target so that the target will reciprocate trust later on. Keeping the trading secret also meant less chance that Yuen’s wife or teenage daughter would learn about his chats with Jessica.

When Yuen agreed to put some money into gold, Jessica told him to download MetaTrader from Apple’s app store. She then told him to use the app to search for a brokerage called S&J Future Limited.

Yuen made it clear he couldn’t afford to lose any money. If he did, he said, he’d have to kill himself. Jessica said there was no need to worry: Uncle was never wrong. Yuen owed it to his father to seize the opportunity.

On Oct. 26, the day he had to go to the hospital to discuss his father’s end-of-life care, Yuen put money on the line for the first time. A conservative investor and lifelong saver, he’d been petrified to put even \$2,000 into the brokerage. Jessica convinced him to start with \$10,000 and taught him the two-step process to fund his account. First, he wired money from his bank to buy a cryptocurrency called ethereum. Then he could transfer the ethereum to a crypto wallet, whose address she provided.

Jessica insisted that using a cryptocurrency would help Yuen minimize his tax burden. He admitted he had very little idea of what he was doing. No matter. When the transfer was done, his S&J account reflected the deposit. And the next day, when Uncle called Jessica with news, Yuen was ready to buy. His account showed he made \$746 after fees.

Jessica claimed she had made \$500,000 on the same trade. She told him to get his account up to \$50,000 to start earning meaningful sums. Yuen agreed and wired \$20,000 the next day and another \$20,000 a few days after that. When Jessica saw that he was doing as she’d directed, she praised him—“you’re smart”—and reminded him that the more money he put in, the more he’d earn for his father and siblings.

Little by little, Jessica encouraged Yuen to invest more and more. Yuen liquidated some mutual funds and wired nearly \$58,000 on Nov. 2. When Uncle called with news later that night, his MetaTrader account showed an eye-popping gain of \$17,000.

In those early weeks, Yuen was thrilled with Jessica. He called her his “true angel” in one message and offered up emojis of joy. Jessica wrote back: “I am not an angel, I am a demon.” She added two smiley-face emojis.

If Cambodia has a capital of fraud, it may well be Sihanoukville, which is named for the country’s onetime king who was ousted in an American-supported coup during the turmoil that erupted as the U.S. bombed the nation during the Vietnam War. The city has transformed over the past five years from a quiet beach resort to a metropolis of casinos and ghostly towers in various stages of construction or decay. The building boom was funded by Chinese investors, who started pouring millions of dollars into Sihanoukville after 2016, when the Philippines [launched a crackdown](#) on illegal online gambling outfits

that were aimed at Chinese citizens. Cambodia had looser gaming regulations, and its government welcomed Chinese investment, making it a perfect substitute.

Soon Cambodia experienced the same [influx of organized crime](#) that had prompted the [crackdown in the Philippines](#). Cambodia, under pressure from the Chinese government, announced a [ban on online gambling](#) in August 2019. Months after that, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and casinos in Cambodia were suddenly [emptied of customers](#) and workers.

Criminal syndicates repurposed their emptied real estate and began using it for scamming operations, according to Jason Tower, Myanmar country director for the United States Institute of Peace, and other observers in the region. “They’re criminal businesses, but they’re businesses at the end of the day,” he said. “So what did they do? They adapted.” And thanks to the pandemic, human traffickers found no shortage of job seekers with computer skills.

These facilities, which are housed in everything from office buildings to garish casino complexes, aren’t all tucked away in isolated neighborhoods. Some are prominently situated in the heart of cities. The White Sand Palace, which contains not only a gambling establishment but also multiple floors of fraud operations, according to former workers there, is located diagonally across the street from the summer residence of the Cambodian prime minister. White Sand didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Many fraud operations are surrounded by barbed wire fences. It’s routine to see windows and balconies completely enclosed by bars. In the Chinatown area of Sihanoukville, storefronts for a noodle shop and a barbershop look unexceptional, until you walk inside and notice that there are bars inside preventing anyone from exiting the complex of heavily guarded buildings.

Over the past year, an array of activists, journalists and nongovernmental organizations in Southeast Asia have begun revealing what’s going on behind the bars in these buildings. Ngô Minh Hiếu, a reformed hacker who now works as a cybersecurity analyst for the Vietnamese government, was one of the first to identify the sites. NGOs such as the International Justice Mission, as well as local media outlets, most notably VOD News, have revealed details of the operations. (ProPublica collaborated with three reporters affiliated with VOD to prepare this article.)

Others, such as Lu Xiangri, who became a volunteer rescuer after escaping a Sihanoukville scam sweatshop, have collected videos depicting abuses in these operations. Lu witnessed severe mistreatment when he was briefly detained inside the Arc de Triomphe last October: He saw a man with a broken leg and a bruised back begging to be sold so that he could avoid further beatings; Lu said the man later died of his injuries. Determined to help others avoid a similar fate, Lu joined a volunteer rescue team, which exposed him to a steady stream of pleas for help that often include graphic images of wounds left by electric shock batons and other corporal punishment. (ProPublica examined scores of similar photos and videos, some of which depict torture—including the use of electronic shock devices on workers’ genitals—but is publishing only a limited number whose authenticity was verified by Lu.)

ProPublica drove up to the gates of three compounds in Sihanoukville where people have alleged being detained and compelled to work as fraudsters. They included the Arc de Triomphe, one complex in Chinatown and another sprawling compound known as White Sand 2. Security guards at the three locations either denied that anything illegal goes on inside or refused to answer questions. “Talk to the boss,” one said, without specifying who the boss was.

Fan said his life was tightly circumscribed when he worked and lived inside the Arc de Triomphe compound. He could leave his building and enter an adjoining casino and karaoke bar—he said he had no interest, though some workers did gamble or go to the karaoke bar—but the presence of guards would dissuade any hopes of going out into the street. During the four months he was at the Arc de Triomphe, he said, he never set foot outside the compound.

His schedule and routine were regimented. Fan worked on the second floor of a building from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., then again from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. He slept in a dorm room with metal bunk beds, with four or five

people per room. There was even a small clinic in the compound that provided first aid and rudimentary medical treatment. As Fan put it: “You can’t go anywhere. You’re either eating, sleeping or working.” The days ran into each other, and Fan tried to anesthetize his own feelings, willing himself into emotional torpor. His only pleasure came from playing a fantasy warfare game on his phone each night before going to bed.

Fan hated the work. Cheating people out of money was the last thing he thought he’d be doing when he answered a job ad. But he couldn’t leave the compound, nor could he afford to buy his way out. His bosses at the Arc de Triomphe demanded \$23,400 for him and his brother. The two were essentially paid on commission, which meant that the more he wanted his freedom, the more he’d have to bilk.

In part because he would hand over promising targets to his boss, but perhaps also because of his reluctance, Fan never delivered a big score. The most he landed was \$30,000. He said he felt so terrible after that “success” that he deleted the victim’s contact information from the organization’s database to make sure the person couldn’t be further stripped of cash. Others on his team, he said, extracted as much \$500,000 from a single victim.

On Nov. 3, as Jessica was helping him turn his newest deposit of \$70,000 into cryptocurrency, Yuen got a message that his father had been taken to the hospital. Yuen raced to join him, and as he sat in the waiting room, some other news came through. It was Jessica, saying her uncle in Hong Kong had given her another signal to trade.

Yuen explained to Jessica that his father was dehydrated and losing the will to eat. He was back in the hospital two days later, crying as he wiped his father’s hands and face. Shortly after, Jessica messaged to ask if his latest deposit of \$20,000 had gone through. Yes, he said. He added that he’d decided to give his father comfort in his dying days by moving him to a hospice.

Jessica didn’t seem to grasp what a hospice was. When Yuen explained that it was a care facility for the terminally ill, she perked up: “You need to make more money.” Jessica told him he should raise his account balance to \$500,000 so he could cover the cost more easily.

Over the next nine days, Yuen cashed in a \$20,000 CD that his mother had bequeathed him and his siblings and tapped a dormant home equity line of credit for \$200,000. Each time he traded with Jessica, his account showed an increase, and soon he surpassed the \$500,000 mark she’d set out for him.

Yuen’s father died in the early morning hours of Nov. 14. Yuen was the only one with him when he breathed his last. He wrote Jessica, seeking sympathy, but got a perfunctory response. This is a common stratagem, said Dove, the psychology researcher. She calls it “scarcity”: withdrawing attention unless the target is doing what the scammer wants. When Yuen wanted to talk about anything related to money, Jessica engaged. When he wanted her attention for anything else, she was distant and tried to steer the conversation back to investing.

The next day, with his father now gone, Jessica gave Yuen another goal. She bragged that she was buying yet another home in New York. The conversation turned to real estate and how Yuen could afford a pied-à-terre there. Why, he asked? “So that we can get very close,” Jessica responded. She explained that Uncle had told her a “big market” was coming soon. “If you want to buy a house in New York, you need to increase your capital,” she said.

In just a few weeks of trading, Yuen had shed much of his previous caution. But now he resisted. He was planning his father’s funeral, he told Jessica, and he was overwhelmed at work. Buying a home in New York would have to wait. Jessica urged him to take out another loan. When Yuen refused, she chided him: “You are a wise man, this is borrowing a chicken to lay eggs.” But Yuen didn’t budge.

By Nov. 18, he had gone six days without depositing more money into his account. That’s when his investing idyll came to an end. That day, his MetaTrader app suddenly closed him out of his positions. By the time it was over, his account showed a balance of minus \$480,000.

Yuen panicked. He couldn't lose any of this money, but he felt he couldn't turn to anyone for help, either. He'd been keeping his MetaTrader habit secret. He lied to his wife and daughter when they asked who he was messaging so frequently, brushing it off as an endless stream of work requests. His siblings didn't know either. No one knew. No one except Jessica.

Jessica convinced him it was his fault. He must have exited the MetaTrader app instead of following her directions. But it was OK, she said. The big market was still there and he could make everything back quickly. "Prepare the funds and earn them back," she said.

Yuen didn't know it, but he had now entered the final stage of pig butchering. This is when scammers sense that their targets have been squeezed dry and are unlikely to deposit more funds. They then shift to the final manipulation: Making the targets aware that they've lost all their money and offering them a seeming lifeline to earn it back. The move aims to heighten the targets' distress. "We normally don't make our best decisions when we're in a state of emotional arousal," said Marti DeLiema, a gerontologist at the University of Minnesota who researches how older Americans are swindled.

Yuen immediately dialed up the financial institutions that managed his family's savings and ordered a sale of \$500,000 worth of mutual fund shares. As he waited for the money to be transferred, he debated whether to inform his family about the loss. Jessica told him, via an emoji depicting an index finger over closed lips, not to say a thing. If he'd only wait a few more days and deposit more funds, he'd turn his loss into a gain. "Yes, we will earn it back," Yuen said.

The following week, Yuen borrowed \$100,000 from his brother-in-law and resumed trading with Jessica as he made final preparations for his father's funeral. On the day of the funeral, he messaged Jessica. "When I was crying today," he wrote, "I wasn't sure if I was crying because I lost my father or I lost all the money." She responded, "Money can be earned, but people are gone if they are gone." Yuen thanked Jessica for her help.

Midway through the following week, Jessica pushed him to borrow even more, but Yuen said he had no one he could turn to. Jessica wasn't buying it. "I don't think you've reached your limit," she said, adding that every time she had asked him to gather cash before, he'd been able to do so.

When she pushed him again the next day, Yuen exploded. "Omg.!!!" he wrote. "You don't understand! I have no more resources to get anymore money!" By that time, he couldn't sleep or eat or do anything other than worry about how to make back his losses.

On Dec. 3, at 11:31 a.m., Jessica messaged Yuen to get ready to do another trade with Uncle's news. Three minutes later, Yuen executed his 23rd trade with Jessica. Once again, disaster struck: All of his positions suddenly got closed, and his entire portfolio vanished as he watched.

Yuen convulsed with panic. He spent the next several hours in shock and terror as the consequences of the loss raced through his mind. "Give me a solution," he begged Jessica. She told him to put more money in. When he told her that all he had left was \$105, Jessica answered: "With \$105, start from scratch, I believe you, you can do it."

Later that day, Yuen confessed to his family. He told his wife he'd lost 30 years' worth of their savings. He later admitted that the money he'd borrowed from her brother and the bank was also gone. In all, he had lost just over \$1 million. Yuen asked his brother to call an ambulance to escort him to a psychiatric ward, where he was placed on a suicide watch.

Yuen was released two days later and spent December wondering what had happened. Jessica stopped replying to his messages after a few days, but he kept on asking. "It's Christmas. Hope you have the heart to help me!!!" he messaged on Dec. 25. (ProPublica got no response to messages it sent to the WhatsApp number used by Jessica.)

Yuen said he didn't accept that he'd been cheated until after Jan. 1. It was only through the intervention of close friends and relatives that he acknowledged what had happened. He found a support group, the Global Anti-Scam Organization, and began piecing together details of the scam, like a Reddit post warning that S&J Future Limited was a sham brokerage. A fellow victim set up a GoFundMe page to help him, and others began to chip in, including a Massachusetts woman who had lost \$2.5 million herself.

But Yuen still struggled to comprehend what kind of person—and where?—would impose such suffering on someone else. He got a partial answer on March 31. That's when Jessica contacted him again using a different phone number. Yuen was prepared: Another GASO member had taught him a trick to track down a person's IP address to figure out their location. The chat log shows Jessica fell for the ruse. When the IP information came back, Yuen said, it indicated Cambodia.

Well before then, Fan and his brother had passed the point of desperation. They began seeking ways out of the Arc de Triomphe. In late January, Fan messaged the governor of Preah Sihanouk province via Facebook. The governor's office responded, asking for Fan's phone number, he said, and soon after the police called.

But the attempt backfired. Fan's bosses found out about the call and summoned him and his brother. They berated the two for tarnishing the company's reputation and threatened legal consequences, according to Fan. The meeting culminated in a videotaped confession in which Fan's brother read a statement, on behalf of both brothers, prepared by their bosses. A video recording shows Fan's brother reading a script in which he stated that they had gotten a "personal loan" from the company and had to repay it. He ended by saying, "We would like to apologize to the provincial governor."

When Fan returned to his desk, his boss was furious. The boss slapped him, Fan said, threw a water bottle in his face and told him to go find the money to pay for his freedom. His boss warned him, according to Fan, that "it doesn't even matter if you die in here" because it would be so easy to kill him. No one would care. (At least six dead bodies have been discovered in the marshlands or beaches near Sihanoukville's scam compounds, many of them Chinese men.)

Fan's police report turned him and his brother into troublemakers in the eyes of their employer. They got sold to another fraud operation, this one back in Phnom Penh, which tacked on further charges to their debt. Each now would have to pay \$15,500 for his freedom.

In February, Fan found a way to get out. He noticed that his new bosses were less strict about security than his previous captors. They occasionally allowed workers to venture outside the compound. So Fan came up with an excuse—visiting a friend—and received permission to leave. He suspects that his captors let him go because they believed that, as long as they still held his brother, he would return.

But Fan didn't return. Meanwhile, his brother called the police, and this time they came through. He was released at the urging of local authorities. But before his brother left, he was forced to confess again, this time in writing. That handwritten letter, which Fan shared with ProPublica, stated that he had borrowed \$31,000 from the company, was happy and working voluntarily and had never been kidnapped or beaten.

Fan spent his first months of freedom in the Great Wall Hotel, a modest five-story guesthouse steps away from Phnom Penh's airport that has become a haven for Chinese scam workers who manage to escape. Life at the Great Wall was safe but monotonous. Most residents were just passing the time as they waited for an opportunity to return to China, which has restricted travel due to its zero-COVID-19 policy. Those limits contributed to rising costs for airline tickets, putting a return nearly out of reach for many of the escapees.

In June, Fan moved out of the Great Wall Hotel. He declined to reveal his exact whereabouts, as he's still afraid that he will be abducted by bounty hunters. Fan has obtained paperwork that will allow him to return to China without his passport, which a scam compound still holds, and his father recently managed to cobble together enough money to pay for him to fly home. Fan dreams of returning to work on his

family's farm, tending to ducks and chickens while safely under his parents' roof. "I won't come out to work again," Fan said. "There's not much future working for other people."

Cambodia's fraud operations often have links not just to organized crime but also to the country's political and business elites. The Arc de Triomphe, for instance, is owned by K99, a real estate and casino junket operator led by Rithy Raksmei, brother of the late tycoon Rithy Samnang. Samnang was also son-in-law to ruling party senator Kok An, whose business empire includes properties that have faced allegations of forced scam labor. And the complex in Chinatown has a hotel that is part-owned by Xu Aimin, a Chinese fugitive who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for masterminding an illicit international gambling ring. (None of these individuals or entities have been prosecuted for involvement in Cambodian scam compounds and none responded to ProPublica's requests for comment.)

In July, the U.S. State Department downgraded Cambodia to the lowest tier on its annual assessment of how well countries are meeting standards for eliminating human trafficking. The department asserted that Cambodian authorities "did not investigate or hold criminally accountable any officials involved in the large majority of credible reports of complicity, in particular with unscrupulous business owners who subjected thousands of men, women, and children throughout the country to human trafficking in entertainment establishments, brick kilns, and online scam operations." A United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Cambodia put it in searing terms in an August report: Workers trapped in Cambodian scam compounds are experiencing a "living hell."

The day the U.N. report appeared, Cambodia's government reversed months of denials and acknowledged that foreign nationals have been trafficked to the country to work in gambling and scam operations. Cambodian Interior Minister Sar Kheng condemned what he called "inhumane acts" and expressed regret. The statement came only days after a dramatic, widely seen video emerged of some 40 Vietnamese men and women breaking out of a reported fraud compound and, chased by baton-wielding men, frantically jumping into a river that divides Cambodia from Vietnam.

Cambodia's senior official working to combat human trafficking, Chou Bun Eng, told ProPublica in a July interview that her government was still figuring out how to respond to scam sweatshops. "This is new for us," she said. Top officials from Cambodian police, immigration and other government agencies met in Phnom Penh in late August to discuss a strategy. They pledged action, then almost immediately, the government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation undercut that stance by releasing a statement in September asserting that human trafficking in Cambodia is "not as serious, bad as reported."

Lacking any form of legally recognized status, escapees from scam compounds are left at the mercy of Cambodian police, who often treat them as illegal immigrants or criminals. Rescued people frequently end up in crowded immigration detention centers, sleeping on the floor in tight quarters without any air conditioning, according to images shared by a detainee.

The police have sometimes pursued the rescuers. Chen Baorong, the former head of a charity group that helped human trafficking victims escape, was arrested in February and charged with incitement. In late August, he was sentenced to two years in prison. Lu Xiangri, the volunteer rescuer, took up Chen's mantle after his arrest, only to himself flee Cambodia in July out of concern for his safety. In response to questions from ProPublica, Cambodia's General Commissariat of National Police wrote that "it is not the government policy to collude with any criminal group or facilitate the use of Cambodian soil by criminals as a hotbed for fraudulent activities overseas."

The governments of China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam have issued warnings in recent months about high-salary job offers emanating from Cambodia. Authorities in Taiwan and Hong Kong have gone so far as to station workers at airports to question people emigrating for work and to warn them about overseas employment scams. Still, even as the governments issue warnings about Cambodia, new operations are gravitating to places like Myanmar, where the violent aftermath of a military coup has created an opportunity for criminal syndicates to expand.

	<p>In the U.S., law enforcement and victims are trying, against long odds, to recapture lost money. In May, the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office seized \$318,000 of stolen crypto funds on behalf of one pig butchering victim. Erin West, the deputy district attorney spearheading the effort, said her team has been able to seize an additional \$233,000 since then and has a few more seizures in the works. Still, most funds aren't recovered, and the chances drop rapidly as time passes.</p> <p>Yuen is losing hope that he'll recover his funds. At one point, he turned down an offer from a self-described hacker to introduce him to an FBI agent who would track down his stolen funds if Yuen paid him \$5,000. Cautious, Yuen asked to see a photograph of the agent's FBI identification. The badge looked authentic, as did the photo ID. But under the photograph, Yuen noticed the signature. It read "Fox Mulder," the name of the fictional detective on "The X-Files."</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Study: Britain neglects child drug dealers
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgyv8a/county-lines-drugs-report
GIST	<p>Children exploited to work in the UK's violent street drug trade often have "horrendous" life stories and are being failed by the authorities, according to new research.</p> <p>A deep dive into the cases of 13 teenage boys involved in 'county lines' drug selling networks – where children are exploited to sell crack and heroin in locations far from home – found most of the boys' childhoods were scarred by severe trauma, domestic abuse, periods of going missing from their homes and living in local-authority care. This made them highly vulnerable and easily targeted by groomers for exploitation.</p> <p>The major report, County Lines: Breaking the Cycle by criminal justice experts Crest Advisory, was overlooked after it was released on the day of Queen Elizabeth's death, but it provides the most in-depth analysis of individual county lines cases so far.</p> <p>It was carried out by linking police records with local authority data and interviews with welfare staff. It identified missed opportunities to prevent children from being drawn into gangs and called for a new approach to tackle the problem.</p> <p>The report said the Department for Education was guilty of "a systematic failure to protect criminally exploited vulnerable children from physical and mental abuse, including torture" because of its hands-off approach. The system for helping victims of modern slavery, the national referral mechanism (NRM) was letting children down by "placing them in limbo at their time of greatest vulnerability" due to "unacceptable drift and delay".</p> <p>It also called for an end to the practice of 'exile' – where children are placed in care a long way from where they live – and recommended young people who have been trafficked to deal drugs should be returned to their home area for a 'crisis intervention'.</p> <p>County lines drug networks – so called because they are centred around dealers' phone lines and also cross the lines of counties in the UK – have been expanding out of major cities such as London, Liverpool and Birmingham and into smaller towns and cities across the UK over the last two decades.</p> <p>Young people are sent out from their inner city neighbourhoods to sell drugs from the homes of local heroin users, overseen by older managers. They are paid but often work in grim conditions and suffer violence at the hands of their bosses, rival gangs and drug users.</p> <p>County lines groups, a major target of the government's 10-year anti-drug strategy, have been responsible for a rise in knife crime and gang culture in towns and cities across rural and coastal Britain such as in East Anglia, Home Counties and South West England, as dealing crews become increasingly embedded out of the big cities.</p>

One of the boys featured in the report, given the pseudonym ‘John’ to protect his identity, was arrested with Class A drugs, two burner phones and cash when aged 15 in 2020. He first became known to social care services when he was less than a year old.

When he was five, he was taken from his mother and put in a care home following concerns about neglect, his mother’s drug use and exposure to domestic abuse. He lived in more than ten care homes in two years, most of which were unregistered and out of the area he had previously lived in.

When he was 14 he became a victim of modern slavery, and was found working in a trap house, where drugs are sold, 200 miles from home. Between the age of 12 and 15 he went missing 90 times and was arrested 20 times. He was also the victim of four assaults and had witnessed extreme violence including a rape.

“[He has] that sort of beacon, light flashing on his head, saying, ‘I am a child in care, please come and exploit me’,” a social worker noted. “[He] wanted to belong. He’s always the odd one out. He wants someone to say, ‘I’ve got your back’. No one ever did. That’s a really sad thing...He has nothing.”

Despite his arrest in 2020, John got more senior roles in county lines dealing. He was given responsibility over the deal line and was involved in incidents in which other young people were purposefully humiliated. Throughout 2021, John’s specialist exploitation worker described a decline in his mental health and that he had started using Xanax. She was concerned John would kill himself.

“The other day I picked him up. It’s really sad because he said to me, “if I die, will you come to my funeral? And will you support my mum and be there for my mum?” And I was like “Oh, well, who’s going to kill you?” And he said, “Well, it can happen any time.”

In spring 2021, John was stabbed. His social worker believed the attack was the result of a ‘drug deal gone wrong’. Later that summer, John witnessed his friend get stabbed in the stomach. “One of his mates was stabbed quite seriously in front of him. John held his stomach together until the ambulance came. I suppose the first time you see someone’s guts hanging out, I suppose it’s horrible. But, again, it’s normalised [to John]. At the beginning of 2022, John was arrested as the perpetrator of a stabbing.”

The report said: “Children who have experienced traumatic events or other serious problems which make them vulnerable have a higher probability of falling victim to child criminal exploitation in county lines. The records of the 13 young people in our sample, all of whom experienced trauma and other serious problems before their identifying incident, reveal a pattern of vulnerability which, if identified and responded to early, could have stopped them being exploited by county lines gangs or minimised the harm they suffered.”

Joe Caluori, one of the authors of the report, part of a body of research into county lines carried out by Crest, told VICE World News: “It’s clear to me that our 13 boys led horrendous lives and there are many more like them. Vulnerability is relative. It might not always be recognisable, so services have to be better at spotting it. However, people need to know that the devolution of county lines is very real. Line operators are recruiting kids local to the dealing bases, and that will make genuine exploitation far to spot in the future. That’s why we need to get our approach right now.”

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HEADLINE	09/14 Shelved report: Covid deaths in prisons
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2022/09/shelved-report-details-14-covid-deaths-inside-washington-prisons
GIST	<p>When “Patient D” developed symptoms of COVID-19, the incarcerated person requested to be seen by medical staff in one of Washington’s state prisons.</p> <p>The person was at increased risk of serious illness from COVID because of chronic health issues, according to a state report, but corrections staff didn’t give the person a medical evaluation. A week later he requested to be evaluated again, after reporting “dry heaving” and an “asthma attack” requiring an inhaler.</p>

“However, a nurse saw the patient at cell front and advised the patient to journal the causes and effects of their thoughts, and to use word searches to ‘get mind off issues,’” according to the report. “There is no documentation of any vital signs being taken, or other evaluation being performed.”

Shortly afterward, Patient D died at a nearby hospital due to COVID-19.

[A draft Office of Corrections Ombuds report](#), dated September 2021, outlines delays in medical care and flaws in documenting COVID cases in Washington’s prisons during the pandemic, which hit such congregate facilities especially hard.

But that Ombuds report has never been publicly released, and none of its recommended changes to improve healthcare in Washington prisons have been implemented. Crosscut obtained the report last week via a public records request.

[It is one of more than half a dozen reports that were delayed or shelved](#) after the departure of the Ombuds office’s inaugural director in November 2021. Gov. Jay Inslee then appointed a temporary director – one of his senior staffers – who has acknowledged halting the COVID report and several other investigations. Inslee in June appointed a new director, Caitlin Robertson, formerly an investigator working in the office. Both Robertson and the Inslee staffer, Sonja Hallum, have defended their decisions to hold off on publishing the reports.

They inherited an office that needed reorganizing, they said, and was in need of a refashioning to better serve incarcerated people seeking assistance. Robertson and Hallum have also said they believe the Ombuds office could be more responsive by working through individual complaints and through negotiations with corrections officials, rather than emphasizing public watchdog reports.

Prison advocates, families of incarcerated people and people inside the prisons have questioned the decision to withhold these reports from the public. They say the loss of public investigation reports deprive incarcerated people of a voice, reduce government transparency and raise questions about how the Inslee administration is dealing with prison conditions.

The delay of the COVID-19 fatalities report also raises questions about state officials’ response to the pandemic. The Washington Department of Corrections received a copy of the draft report last year, according to the document, but since the department never received a final version, it never instituted any changes, according to spokesperson Chris Wright.

“The department is waiting for the final version of the report from the Office of Corrections Ombuds,” Wright added. “Once that happens, DOC looks forward to continuing to work with the OCO and examine next steps to address any issues raised in the report.”

Meanwhile, in an statement emailed Monday, Robertson said a direct discussion between her office and prison officials on the COVID-19 fatalities isn’t yet underway: “The facilitated conversation has not occurred and the participant list is not yet final.”

Robertson also wrote that she plans to publicly release an updated version of the COVID-19 fatalities report in the future. That’s a change from July, when she wouldn’t commit to releasing the report. “Each individual death is not systemic, because each one of them was a different interaction,” Robertson said at the time.

The Department of Corrections has for years struggled to provide adequate health care within the prisons, which had been highlighted in previous Ombuds reports on its [COVID-19 response](#) and [cancer care](#).

Those struggles continue. Last week, the state Department of Labor & Industries [fined corrections officials \\$84,000](#) for failing to follow safety rules in the wake of a tuberculosis outbreak at Stafford Creek Corrections Center in Aberdeen.

The draft COVID-19 fatalities report released to Crosscut noted that Washington's prisons did better than many other states during the pandemic, with fewer COVID-19 deaths. But it outlined several concerns.

Of the 14 incarcerated people who died between June 2020 and August 2021, six were not adequately evaluated after they requested to be seen for symptoms, according to the report. In five instances, a clinician wasn't contacted for an evaluation, despite concerning symptoms. Documentation processes were not followed in five cases, resulting in delays for patient evaluations.

In four cases, it took three to six days for incarcerated people tested for COVID-19 to get test results. By contrast, incarcerated people tested after being taken to a hospital received their results the same day, according to the report.

The draft report recommended several improvements. It urged better screening processes to encourage symptomatic patients to report their illness, and to work to remind incarcerated people to seek care for acute conditions.

The review also called for corrections officials to move more swiftly to provide care when patients' symptoms worsen or their condition deteriorates. It also recommended speedier lab tests.

In an email, Inslee spokesperson Jaime Smith wrote that the virus "tested and strained every organization's ability to deliver care, goods and services to patients, clients and customers."

"The OCO's findings do shine a light on where DOC's health care delivery needs to be reviewed," Smith wrote. "The new approach of engaging the unexpected fatality review committee in facilitated discussions that look at these deaths and the overall system will hopefully identify any systemic issues, and most importantly, how to fix them."

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HEADLINE	09/14 Felon in DOC custody in attempted rape
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/why-a-convicted-bank-robber-in-doc-custody-is-a-suspect-in-an-attempted-seattle-rape
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - FOX 13 News is investigating why a convicted bank robber sentenced to 43 months in prison, and who was still in Department of Corrections custody, was able to become a suspect in a recent attempted rape in Seattle.</p> <p>On Aug. 31, Amber Myers says a man came into her business, while she talked to her dad on the phone, pulled out a knife and tried to rape her.</p> <p>Seattle Police says surveillance video from a nearby business captured images of the suspect. Police say the suspect is 31-year-old Jordan Alexander.</p> <p>Police say he is a repeat offender known for wearing costumes and disguises.</p> <p>SPD: Alexander has attempted to disguise himself by wearing a head wrap, mask, sunglasses and light-colored make up.</p> <p>FOX 13 News found out that Alexander was still in Department of Corrections custody at the time of this alleged attack.</p> <p>Documents we obtained show Alexander was sentenced to 43 months in prison, following a bank robbery. He was sentenced in July 2021.</p> <p>In July of 2022, DOC officials say Alexander arrived at a work release center in Seattle. Here he would work a full-time job, while under partial confinement, with the ability to leave the center.</p>

To be eligible for work release there are several eligibility [expectations](#), including having a record of good behavior.

Another parameter for work release states that anyone with 12 months, or six months if eligible, left on their sentence can be referred to work release.

However, Alexander served about 12 months of his 43-month sentence.

DOC officials say he also received what is known as "earned release time".

[Earned release time](#) is where a prisoner's sentence is reduced for good behavior and good performance.

DOC officials say Alexander's earned release time date was Oct. 10, 2022. That would have equaled about 35% of his total original 43-month sentence.

However, he did not make it to that date. On Aug. 30, DOC reports Alexander escaped his work release. The next day is when Seattle Police say he attacked Myers.

FOX 13 News reached out to the DOC for an on-camera interview. They responded with this statement:

"DOC takes these situations extremely seriously, and understands how frightening they can be for the community."

Mr. Alexander was scheduled to release from prison on October 14, 2022. Providing the individual a less restrictive housing assignment in a reentry center prior to release provides a higher likelihood of success upon his inevitable release. DOC uses a rigorous risk-based system to determine eligibility for work release for each individual in our custody. It includes analyzing the nature of the crime committed, the length of their sentence and whether or not they have displayed good behavior. Using that evidence-based method, DOC determined that a less restrictive, partial confinement was the appropriate option in this case to provide Alexander with the services he needs for a successful reentry.

DOC is working with all law enforcement agencies within that jurisdiction including Seattle Police department to ensure that this individual is brought back into custody as quickly as possible."

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HEADLINE	09/14 Police: 2 dead in Seattle standoff, home fire
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/house-fire-armed-man-montlake/281-da5b7db5-76a3-4bf6-94b0-b9dc1ff04774
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Two bodies were recovered from a house fire in Seattle's Montlake neighborhood Wednesday morning after police say a suspect tried to stab officers who responded to the scene.</p> <p>At about 8:30 a.m., officers responded to multiple 911 calls of a man yelling and a woman in distress in the 2200 block of 25th Avenue East, according to Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz.</p> <p>When officers knocked on the door of the home, the man said he was armed and refused to come out. He said the woman in the home was injured.</p> <p>Four officers went into the home, and Diaz said the man tried to stab the officers with a knife.</p> <p>The officers retreated, and a SWAT team was brought in. However, there were smoke and flames from a fire in the home, and that team retreated as well.</p>

	<p>Diaz said the Seattle Fire Department took over once it was determined no one would survive the house fire. Factors in that decision include whether smoke has filled the home for a certain amount of time and the amount of fire in the home, Seattle Fire spokesperson Kristin Tinsley said.</p> <p>There are three residential units in the home, two of which are upstairs and one that's on the main level and in the basement, according to Diaz. There was smoke and flame damage to all three levels of the home, according to Tinsley.</p> <p>Crews recovered the body of a man from the main floor – who is believed to be the suspect – and a second body from the basement, Tinsley said. Occupants from the other units are accounted for, Diaz said.</p> <p>The four responding officers are being treated at Harborview Medical Center for smoke inhalation, Diaz said. No firefighters were injured, according to Tinsley.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Boston package explosion a hoax?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/boston-ems-responds-reported-explosion-person-injured/story?id=89852768
GIST	<p>Boston police and federal authorities are questioning whether an explosion ever took place on the Northeastern University campus Tuesday evening, law enforcement sources told ABC News.</p> <p>Police and school officials said Tuesday that a package had detonated at the university, resulting in a school staff member sustaining a minor hand injury.</p> <p>Boston EMS had responded to reports of an explosion at the university, with the 45-year-old victim transported to an area hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, according to police and officials.</p> <p>The Northeastern University staff member who allegedly sustained injuries in what authorities called a "package detonation" had opened a hard-backed, Pelican-type case, law enforcement sources told ABC News.</p> <p>There's no apparent damage to the case and investigators have found no evidence of an explosion occurring, the sources said. Instead, authorities are looking at whether the entire thing was a hoax.</p> <p>The alleged package was sent to Holmes Hall on Leon Street, where police responded at 7:18 p.m., authorities said. Boston Police Superintendent Felipe Colon said there was a second similar package that was rendered safe by the bomb squad.</p> <p>Law enforcement's preliminary assessment is that the reported minor explosion on campus was not random, two sources briefed told ABC News.</p> <p>Authorities also found what the sources described as an anonymous note railing against virtual reality, among other things.</p> <p>There is no intelligence indicating a further threat, according to the FBI's Boston office.</p> <p>A manager at Northeastern's virtual reality lab, the sources said, is apparently the 45-year-old male staff member who was hurt. The injuries are reportedly minor abrasions to both forearms.</p> <p>In a statement to Boston ABC News station WCVB, Northeastern University said a package delivered to Holmes Hall "detonated when a staff member opened it."</p> <p>A second suspicious package was cleared and did not contain an explosive, according to the two sources. There have been a number of reports of suspicious packages that police have checked, and they've searched buildings and mail rooms at Northeastern and nearby colleges for similar-looking packages, the sources said.</p>

	<p>Boston Police Commissioner Michael Cox said a number of campus buildings were evacuated. He urged citizens to come forward if they see something out of the ordinary.</p> <p>"We're trying to gather facts now," Colon added.</p> <p>"The building has been evacuated and a notification was sent to the Boston campus at 7:55 p.m. urging people to avoid the area. We will update members of the Northeastern community when more information is available," the university added in its statement.</p> <p>Police for Northeastern University urged people to avoid areas around the school's Holmes Hall as they conduct an investigation into the incident.</p> <p>Nearby colleges and universities in and around Boston were advised to be on watch for similar-looking Pelican-type cases.</p> <p>Sources said the case appears to have contained no explosive material. Instead, it was believed to have had somehow been pressurized and, when opened, rapidly depressurized, causing the supposed detonation.</p> <p>The Boston Police Department's bomb squad, Boston EMS and the Boston Fire Department were all on the scene investigating the incident, officials said. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is assisting with the investigation, according to a spokesperson.</p> <p>Northeastern is a private research university located in Boston.</p>
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HEADLINE	09/14 Sheriff: inmate, jailer shared 949 calls
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/sheriff-inmate-jailer-shared-949-phone-calls-escape-89914034
GIST	<p>FLORENCE, Ala. -- An Alabama inmate who authorities say escaped with the help of a jail supervisor who later killed herself in Indiana shared nearly 1,000 phone calls with the woman before the breakout, news outlets reported.</p> <p>Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said Casey White and Vicky White, who were not related, may have planned his escape over the phone, but authorities must listen to each of 949 calls before making a determination.</p> <p>Authorities have said the two were in a romantic relationship and Singleton said at least some of the calls were sexual in nature.</p> <p>The phone calls occurred after Casey White was transferred from the Lauderdale County Jail to a state prison where he was held until being returned to Lauderdale County before the escape, the sheriff said.</p> <p>Casey White walked out of the county jail in handcuffs in April accompanied by Vicky White, the assistant corrections director, prompting an 11-day search for the pair. On the day of the escape, Vicky White, 56, told co-workers she was driving the inmate to a mental health evaluation.</p> <p>The two were eventually discovered in Evansville, Indiana, where Casey White was captured. Vicky White shot herself in the head moments before the man was arrested, authorities said.</p> <p>Casey White, who was jailed on a capital murder charge at the time of the escape and also serving time on other convictions, was charged with escape and murder in the woman's death. The defense has filed documents suggesting Vicky White was in charge of the escape and Casey White's mother has said he might not have known what was going on.</p>
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